The Essence of Hinduism

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THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

By
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TO THE READER

I would like to say to the diligent reader of my writings and to others who are interested in them that I am not at all concerned with appearing to be consistent. In my search after Truth I have discarded many ideas and learnt many new things. Old as I am in age, I have no feeling that I have ceased to grow inwardly or that my growth will stop at the dissolution of the flesh. What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of Truth, my God, from moment to moment, and therefore, when anybody finds any inconsistency between any two writings of mine, if he has still faith in my sanity, he would do well to choose the later of the two on the same subject.

M. K. Gandhi

Harijan, 29-4-1933, p. 2

EDITORIAL NOTE

Hinduism differs from other faiths like Christianity and Islam in two ways. First of all, it does not believe in any dogma and rejects the exclusive claim of any individual, however highly evolved, to the monopoly of Truth. It believes that the Supreme Being may be approached through several paths such as Knowledge *(Dnyana)*, Devotion *(Bhakti)*, Action *(Karma)*, and *Yoga* (Psychical Control). In fact, in actual life, the path trodden by a seeker may be a combination of two or more of these disciplines, depending on the choice of the individual in consonance with his temperament aptitude and attitude. Hinduism is not founded by any individual; it has grown or evolved naturally, and, therefore, remains gloriously undefined. In fact, it cannot be defined precisely as any other religion can be. However, the following description thereof by a foreign thinker is nearer the mark than any other: HInduism "is hardly a dogma but a working hypothesis of human conduct adapted to different stages of spiritual development and different conditions of life". Starting with this working definition, let us probe a little more into the subject.

What is really meant by *Dharma* or Religion? Broadly speaking, the universal moral law governing both the sacred and temporal aspects of human life is known as *Dharma.* Confucius has described in very significant and profound words how the universal moral law operates. He says :

"The ordinance of God is what we call the law of our being. To fulfil the law of our being is what we call the moral law. The moral law when reduced to a system is what we call religion.

"The moral law is a law from whose operation we cannot for one instant in our existence escape. A law from which we escape is not the moral law. Wherefore it is that the moral man watches diligently . . . over his secret thoughts.

"When the passions such as joy, anger, grief and pleasure have not awakened, that is our true self, or moral being. When these passions awaken and each and all attain due measure and degree, that is the moral order. Our true self or moral being is the great reality of existence, and moral order is the universal law in the world.

"When true moral being and moral order are realized, the universe then becomes a cosmos and all things attain their full growth and development."[1]

The above question succinctly brings out how integration of the moral being and moral order alone can usher in the universe the Kingdom of Heaven.

It is undeniable that a Law of Power higher than human will regulates events. We may all have our different definitions of the Law or Power. In fact, there would be as many definitions of the Law as there are men and women. "But beyond all that variety of definitions there would be a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For the root is one." Gandhiji describes the Law as "that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know". If it were possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of that Law or Power in one word, Gandhiji would call it TRUTH, as it tends to disaram any criticism naturally. And a continuous and relentless search, after Truth would by the *summum bonum* of human life.

Speaking of this conception of the scientific ideal in his famous letter to Charles Kingsley, T. H. Huxley observed, "Sit down before fact as a little child, be prepared to give up every preconceived notion, follow humbly wherever and to whatever abysses Nature leads or you shall learn nothing." This pursuit of Truth is also the ideal of Hinduism though the means for discovery of physical and spiritual laws must naturally vary but the basic scientific attitude and temperament are identical in both the cases. A scientist tries to understand the ultimate Truth through a series of steps, meticulously analysing each step. But in ancient India sages went straight to the Reality with the help of certain mental paradigms (meditation formulae).[2] Says Paul Deussen, "That India more than any other country is the land of symbols is owing to the nature of Indian thought, which applied itself to the most abstruse problems before it was even remotely in a position to treat them intelligently."[3]

The advice of Buddha, one of the greatest of Hindus, to Kalamas, a Kshatriya tribe of Kosaldesh, was also in keeping with this scientific ideal. He said, "Do not accept what I have said to you

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1 Juan Mascaro, *Lamps of Fire,* Methuen, London, 1961, p. 32.

2 *Prabuddha Bharat,* Editorial, May 1981, p. 202 at p. 206

3 Paul Deussen, *The Philosophy of the Upanishads,* Dover Publication Inc., New York, 1950, p. 120

because it has been so said in the past; do not accept it because it has been handed down by tradition; do not accept it thinking it may be so; do not accept it because it is also in the holy scriptures; do not accept it because it can be proved by inference; do not accept it thinking it is wordly wisdom; do not accept it because it seems to be plausible; do not accept it because it is said by a famous or holy monk; but if you find that it appeals to your sense of discrimination and conscience as being conducive to your benefit and happiness, then accept it and live up to it."

When stoning to death for apostasy was sought to be defended by heads of many Islamic bodies as being enjoined in the Koran, Gandhiji questioned the morality of the method under any circumstance whatsoever and wrote in a forthright manner:

"Every formula of every religion has, in this age of reason, to submit to the acid test of reason and universal justice if it is to ask for universal assent. Error can claim no exemption even if it can be supported by the scriptures of the world." *(Young India,* 20-2-1925, p. 74)

"I would like to say that even the teachings themselves of the Koran cannot be exempt from criticism. Every true scripture only gains by criticism. After all we have no other guide but our reason to tell us what may be regarded as revealed and what may not be. ... I fully endorse the Maulana's statement that error is a relative term. But we know as a matter of fact that some things are universally accepted as errors. Death by torture is, I expect, such an error." *(Young India,* 5-3-1925, p. 181)

"Everything has to submit to the test of reason. . . . There are undoubtedly things in the world which transcend reason. We do not refuse to bring them on the anvil of reason but they will not come themselves. By their very nature they defy reason. Such is the mystery of the Deity. It is not inconsistent with reason, it is beyond it." *(Young India,* 26-3-1925, p. 110)

The above extracts from Gandhiji's articles truly sum up the attitude of Hinduism to the questions which arise for decision in the application of the criterion of Truth to matters pertaining to public morality and general humanity.

The Hindu classical religious thought is classified under two groups, viz. *Shrutis and Smritis* including *Dharmashastra. Shrutis* which include Vedas and Upanishads contain knowledge of 'Reality As It Is' which can be verified and is universal in its character. As

such it may be characterised as PHILOSOPHIA PERENNIS or Perennial Philosophy. "The Perennial Philosophy is primarily concerned with the one, divine Reality substantial to the manifold world of things and lives and minds. But the nature of this one Reality is such that it cannot be directly and immediately apprehended except by those who have chosen to fulfil certain conditions, making themselves loving, pure in heart, and poor in spirit. Why should this be so? We do not know. It is just one of those facts which we have to accept, whether we like them or not and however implausible and unlikely they may seem. . . . It is only be making physical experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of matter and its potentialities. And it is only by making psychological and moral experiments that we can discover the intimate nature of mind and its potentialities. In the ordinary circumstances of average sensual life these potentialities of the mind remain latent and unmanifested. If we would realize them, we must fulfil certain conditions and obey certain rules, which experience has shown empirically to be valid."[4]

The eternal Truth may also be explained in another way. "This great Universe is pervaded by the Spirit. The Spirit (Self) is one unmoving; He (It) is swifter than the mind. The senses cannot reach Him (It). He (It) is ever beyond them. Unmoving, He (It) outruns the pursuit by senses. Out of the Spirit (Self) comes the breath that is the life of all things. He (It) moves and He (It) moves not. He (It) is far, and He (It) is near. He (It) is within all, and He (It) is outside all." (Ishopanishad, 4 and 5). In other words, the Spirit or the Power that sustains the Universe is immanent, universal and transcendental. But that Spirit which is consciousness raised to infinity, in order to become immanent, must rule and transform the human heart. With *Nishkama Karma* or desireless action and pure and single-minded devotion, the seeker of Truth can overcome death and with the transcendental knowledge can have direct perception of the Divine Reality and attain immortality. (Ishopanishad, 11 and 14)

Smirits derive their origin and also authority from a personal founder and deal with social and religious rules and regulations. These laws can be modified or altered, as a code that sustains the society in one age may choke it in another age. And as socio-economic conditions change with the changing technology, which in turn influence the political structure, laws need to be recast and

4. Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy,* Chatto & Windus, London, 1946, Introduction, pp. 2-3

reinterpreted in the light of the milieu and context of the changing conditions. If the laws do not keep pace with or are out of step with the changing conditions, they can be the cause of strangling the social organism or of social upheavals, sometimes violent and bloody. So it is prudent and in social interest to leave the formulation, amendment and reinterpretation of laws to the political constitutions and social conscience. That's how the Hindu Law has been codified by the Loka Sabha after the attainment of independence by India, to bring it in line with the modern life, conditions and ideas.

The division of religious thought into the Knowledge of the Spirit or Divine Reality and the Religious and Social Code of Conduct is a unique feature of Hinduism and is not to be found in other religions said to be 'revealed'. The wisdom of this course of action can be studied from the record of Hinduism. No wars have been fought in the name of Hinduism (which includes Buddhism and Jainism) unlike the medieval religious crusades between Islamic and Christian potentates. Nor have there been any inquisitions in Hinduism for questioning any religious belief. Even though, Buddhism was the State Religion of the kingdom founded by Ashoka, the wisest and the greatest king in human history, it was truly secular in outlook and did not discriminate against Hindusim and Jainism. It was again a Hindu king in Gujarat who gave shelter to Parsis when they fled from Persia to escape religious persecution at the hands of Muslim zealots.

The flexibility and catholicity of Hindu civilization enables her "at once to renew herself in terms of her own essential nature and to change herself so as to bring herself in harmony with the form of age in which we live. In plain terms, the ancient Indian spirit takes on a new form without ceasing to be itself. India's religions have all been natural religions. They have grown and prospered naturally. They were not self-aware because they were expressions of the cosmic reality. They did not define themselves. But when the Christian challenge arose, they had to define themselves. They did. Lokamanya's, Gandhiji's and Aurobindo's commentaries on the Gita were part of that effort at self-definition. . . . The Gita and the two epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata, now sell in lakhs of copies year after year. This intellectualization of the life of the Spirit, if we may so describe this phenomenon, has deprived it of some of its natural flow but it has also given a strength which is valuable in our days."[5]

Contrasting the response of the world of Arab-Islam to Western culture, Girilal Jain opines that refusing to be similarly creative and

flexible in the interpretation of the *Koran,* the *Hadith* and the *Sunnah,* it has not only denied itself a similar advantage but as a result, fallen into a deep state of shock and despair. It is undeniable that because a large majority of Indians profess Hinduism that democracy has succeeded in India while it has failed to take roots in other countries of the third world. Hinduism abhors stagnation. Hinduism is like the mighty Ganges which has been joined in its onward flow by other streams and tributaries. Unfortunately Islam and Christianity which came to India as appendages of foreign conquerors, did not mingle with the main stream though they undoubtedly inter-acted with Hinduism and influenced each other.

Another distinctive feature of Hinduism is the doctrine of *karma* and rebirth. Transmigration is not a theory but a fact. Gandhiji also believed in further life and in the continuity of *karma* through successive births. What we sow here, we must reap here and elsewhere – there is no escape. The law of *karma* is relentless. However, repentance even during one's last moments will wash away sin and sterilize it of consequences. Among Hinduism's contributions to the world are the ideas of man's identity with the dumb creation and four *ashramas.* The reader will find references to these and many other ideas in the pages of this Book.

One of the texts in the *Smritis* says that whatever is followed by the learned, the good and those who are free from anger and attachment and whatever is experienced in the heart is *dharma* or religion. Gandhiji though not an *acharya* or an crudite scholar like Adi Shankaracharya, is the authentic voice of age-old Hinduism in modern times who has given it a new turn and direction. He called his autobiography *The Story of My Experiments with Truth.* He found after a long, arduous and relentless search for Truth that Hinduism satisfied all his highest moral aspirations and he found solace and a friend, guide and philosopher in the Bhagavad Gita. He says, "It (the Gita) is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple."

To all Gandhiji recommends without any hesitation *Nama* and prayer for purification of their minds and transcending

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5. Girilal Jain, 'Assessing India's Progress', *Times of India,* Bombay, dated 15-8-1986

consciouesness. In consonance with the discourse in Chapter 12 of the Gita, Gandhiji advises a seeker to become a devotee one way or other and from his own experience recommends *Nama* and prayer.

The Essence of Hinduism is so planned and arranged that each section naturally leads to the next one. The first chapter examines the moral basis of Hinduism. The nature of the universal Moral Law or Power that sustains the universe is described in the second chapter. How can a seeker come face to face with the Supreme Spirit – through faith or trained reason or a judicious combination of both? An answer to this conundrun will be found in the third chapter. The Bhagvad Gita is an *Upanishad*, a text on *Brahmavidya* and an exposition of *yoga-shastra* and no book on Hinduism can be said to be complete without a reference to it. In fact it can be said to be the only book which harmonizes all the approaches to the Supreme and hence Gandhiji's views on Gita find a place of honour in this Collection. The beaten track so familiar to all and so easy for all to tread, viz., *Nama* and prayer is dealt with in the last chapter.

This Book is primarily meant for lay readers and Hindu boys and girls attending English medium schools and brought up in families without any religious background, or in which religion has a minimal influence. As such, it will serve as an introduction to Hinduism. For further study, the interested reader may refer to the exhaustive collection in three volumes titled *In Search of the Supreme* by Gandhiji.

12-10-1986 V. B. Kher

GLOSSARY

Acharya—Preceptor

Ahimsa—Non-violence; love

Antyaj—An outcaste

Ashram—A place of spiritual retirement; a hermitage; a place for study and disciplining life

Asura—Demon

Atman—The Self; the Soul

Avatar—An incarnation of God. This word usually indicates the ten incarnations of Vishnu, the God of preservation and sustenance

Bhagvadgita—(popularly known as Gita) a part of the great Hindu epic Mahabharata wherein Krishna is the divine hero

Bhajan—Hymn

Bhakta—Devotee

Bhakti—Devotion

Bhattha—Daily allowance

Brahmcharaya—Continence; celibacy; self-control; also the first stage of a high caste Hindu's [usually referred to as <co (*Dwija*) in religious texts] religious life

Brahman—The Ultimate Reality

Brahmana—The first or the highest of the four castes sanctioned by the Hindu religion (literally, one who knows Brahman – Ultimate Reality); see Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shoodra

Chandala—An outcaste

Dal—Corps

Dal—Pluses

Darshan—Sight; vision

Deenabandhu—Friend of the afflicted. An honorific title conferred by Indians on the late C. F. Andrews, a close friend of Gandhiji

Deva—God

Dharma—Religion; duty. A comprehensive Sanskrit term embracing the concepts of law, justice, duty and virtue rolled into one.

Dharamshala—A free rest-house for travellers or pilgrams

Dharna—The sitting in restraint at the door of a debtor by the creditor or his agent

Gatha—Collection of religious hymns

Gayatri—Invocation of Sun-God, recited by the higher caste Hindus

Ghat (burning)—Place where dead bodies are cremated

Gita—See Bhagvadgita

Gopi—A milk-maid of Gokul where Krishna, the divine hero of Mahabharata, is supposed to have spent his childhood

Guna—Quality or attribute. There are three attributes that may be predicated of all existing things, namely *sattva* (goodness; harmony; rhythm), *rajas* (passion; motion; action), and *tamas* (darkness; inertia; sloth)

Guru—A preceptor; a teacher.

Harijan—Literally, a man of God; an untouchable. A term first used for untouchables by Gandhiji. Also refers to the weekly *Harijan* founded by Gandhiji in February 1933

Hridaya—Heart

Ishwara—Creator; Supreme personal God

Kaliuyuga—According to Hindu mythology there have been four Ages since the beginning of time, viz. सत्ययुग *(Satyayuga)*, त्रेतायुग (*Tretayuga),* द्वापरयुग *(Dwaparyuga)* and कलियुग *(Kaliyuga)*, the present *yuga*, the Age of universal degeneracy

Kamadhenu—The cow of Indra from which each could milk what he wished for. Hence, the giver of desired objects

Karma—Action; also popularly used in the sense of fate (accruing as a result of past actions)

Karmayogi—One who practises *karmayoga*, i.e., the doctrine of detachment in action

Khadi—Hand-spun, hand-woven cloth

Kirpan—A metallic weapon which Sikhs are enjoined to carry

Kshatriya—The second of the four castes (the warrior caste) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Vaishya and Shoodra

Kundalini—Serpent power in the six plexuses, supposed to be located in the body, by awakening of which the individual is said to realize oneness with the supernatural principle

Kurta—Man's upper garment; an Indian shirt

Lathi—Wooden staff

Lota—Brass or copper container (usually used for water)

Mahabharata—One of the great Hindu epics wherein Krishna is the divine hero

Mahatma—Great Soul

Mantra—A verse in a religious text; incantation

Maryada—Restriction; limitation
Math—Hindu Monastery
Maya—Creation-illusion; veil hiding the Reality from man's ego
Moksha—Self-realization
Mukta—A realized soul
Nirvana—Nothingness; release from the cycle of rebirth; supreme bliss
Padmanabhadas—Servant of the Lord Vishnu, the Hindu God of preservation and sustenance
Panchama—Belonging to the fifth caste; an outcaste
Pandit—Learned man
Panjrapol—Institution for tending cattle, particularly, old and infirm
Parayana—Perusal or reading through a sacred text, e.g., Ramayana, Bhagvadgita, etc.
Pariah—An outcaste
Phoongyi—Bhuddhist monk
Pitriloka—The region inhabited by the manes
Poorna Swaraj—Complete or full independence
Prarthana—Prayer
Prayashchitta—Expiation or atonement
Rajas—See *Guna*
Ramadhuna—Rhythmical chanting of the name of Rama — रघुपतिराघवराजाराम — (Raghupati, Raghav, Rajaram etc.)
Ramanama—The sacred name of Rama
Ramarajya—Kingdom of Rama which was known for its beneficent and just rule; now used to mean any just rule working for the good of the people.
Ramayana—One of the great Hindu epics wherein Rama is the divine hero
Rishi—Sage
Rudras—A team of Hindu deities of destruction constituting together Rudra in the Vedic belief
Sanatan—Believer in Hindu scriptures; also used popularly in the sense of an orthodox person
Sandhya—Religious meditation and repetition of mantras accompanied by certain formularies like sipping water, etc.; a ritual practised by higher caste Hindus at sunrise, noon and sunset
Sannyasa—Renunciation of worldly life; the last stage of a higher-caste Hindu's religious life
Sannyasi—One who has taken Sannyasa

Samskar—Essential and purificatory rites or ceremonies among Hindus like the naming of the child, first feeding of the child, thread-ceremony, etc.; conscious and unconscious, domestic, social, cultural and religious influences which go to the making of a person; mental characteristics

Sanstha—Voluntary association of persons

Sati—A chaste and virtuous woman, spiritually highly evolved

Sattva—See *Guna*

Satya—Truth

Satyagraha—Literally, insistence on truth; clinging to truth; soul-force; truth-force

Savarna—Belonging to high caste

Shastra—Hindu scriptures

Shloka—Verse; stanza

Shraddha—Ceremony to the manes performed by higher-caste Hindus

Shuddhi—Conversion to Hinduism; literally, self-purification

Shudra or Shoodra—The last of the four castes (the caste of labourers) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya

Smriti—The body of law as delivered originally by Manu and other law-givers to their respective pupils and committed by them, from memory, to writing

Supari—Areca nut

Swami—A holy person. Also used in the sense of a master in contrast to a servant

Swaraj—Self-rule; self-government

Tal—Musical time or measure in Indian music

Tamas—See *Guna*

Tapasya—Penance

Tilak—Caste mark used on forehead

Upanishad—Sacred Sanskrit books of the earliest religious philosophy

Vaishya—The third of the four castes (caste of traders and agriculturists) sanctioned by the Hindu religion; see Brahmana, Kashatriya and Shudra

Varna—Caste based on occupation; see Varnashrama. Also pigmentation of the skin

Varnasankara—Confussion of castes

Varnashrama—The system of four castes (based on occupations) and four stages of life (called Ashramas) for the first three castes (Brahmana, Kshatriya and Vaishya), namely, ब्रह्मचर्य —

Brahmacharya (student's stage), गृहस्थ — Grihastha (house-holder's stage), वानप्रस्थ — Vanaprastha (forest-dweller's stage) and संन्यास — Sannyasa (stage of recluse), sanctioned by the Hindu religion

Vishvavidyalaya—University

Yajna—Religious sacrifice

Yoga—The science of control of the body and the mind; the science which teaches one how to unite, to join together, the individual self and the Supreme Self

Yogi—One who practises Yoga

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THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

SECTION ONE: THE MORAL BASIS OF HINDUISM

1

ORIGIN OF HINDUISM

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

Gandhiji then referred to a question that was sent by a member of the audience : What is a Hindu? What is the origin of the word? Is there any Hinduism?

Those were pertinent questions for the time. He was no historian, he laid claim to no learning. But he had read in some authentic book on Hinduism that the word 'Hindu' did not occur in the Vedas but when Alexander the Great invaded India, the inhabitants of the country to the East of the Sindhu, which is known by the English-speaking Indians as the Indus, were described as Hindus. The letter 'S' had become 'H' in Greek. The religion of the these inhabitants became Hinduism and as they knew it, it was a most tolerant religion. It gave shelter to the early Christians who had fled from persecution, also to the Jews known as Beni-Israil as also to the Parsis. He was proud to belong to that Hinduism which was all-inclusive, and which stood for tolerance. Aryan scholars swore by what they called Vedic religion and Hindustan was otherwise known as Aryavarta. He had no such aspiration. Hindustan of his conception was all sufficing for him. It certainly included the Vedas, but it also included much more. He could detect no inconsistency in declaring that he could, without in any way whatsoever impairing the dignity of Hinduism, pay equal homage to the best of Islam, Christianity, Zoroastrianism and Judaism. Such Hinduism will live as long as the sun shines. Tulasidas has summed it up in one *doha*: "The root of religion is embedded in mercy, whereas egotism is rooted in the love of the body. Tulasi says that mercy should never be abandoned, even though the body perishes."

Harijan, 30-11-'47, p. 442 at p. 446

2
WHO IS HINDU ?
I

(A question and answer thereto from the correspondence of Gandhiji with a correspondent which, appeared under the title "Correspondence — A Catechism" is reproduced below.)

Q.: You have always termed yourself a 'Hindu'. On the other hand you are not ready to accept the dictates of the Hindu pandits on even their Shastras concerning child-marriage, widow-remarriage, untouchability, etc. You say in *Young India* dated August 26th: "The Smritis bristle with contradictions. Inspiring verses on self-restraint could not be written at the same time and by the same pen that wrote the verses encouraging the brute in man." The same, I submit, might be said of the many Puranas of the Hindus. Denying the Authority of these books, I do not understand how you can call yourself a "Hindu" (as understood at present) who has an implicit faith in the absurdities and immoralities (derogatory to common sense) preached by some of the Puranas. If you think it is not necessary for a Hindu to believe so, it would be in the service of truth if you were to define the Hindu religion and clear the arguments for your being regarded a Hindu.

You would not say a man is a "Hindu", if he likes to call himself a Hindu, even though he does not follow the doctrine and Shastric injunction of the latter. Thus if I were to term myself a Christiam and say that it is not necessary for a true Christian to have faith in the Bible or even Christ, I could only be termed a pretender.

Besides when you disagree in the matter of Shastras from the Hindus, it requires to be explained why you should prefer to call yourself a Hindu (in spite of the evil associations connected with this word and and in spite of the word not being found in any Shastra of the Hindus even) and not an "Arya" which is a better term even in itself. Besides your teachings as regards the interpretation of the Hindu Shastras have much in common with those of Arya Samaj.

A. : I call myself Sanatani Hindu, because I believe in the Vedas, Upanishads, the Puranas and the writings left by the holy reformers. This belief does not require me to accept as authentic everything that passes as Shastras. I reject everything that contradicts the fundamental principles of morality. I am not required to accept the *ipse dixit* or the interpretations of pundits. Above all I call myself a Sanatani Hindu, so long as the Hindu society in general accepts me as such. In a concrete manner he is a Hindu who believes in God, immortality of the soul, transmigration, the law of Karma and Moksha, and who tries to practise Truth and Ahimsa in daily life, and therefore practises cow-protection in its widest sense and understands and tries to act according to the law of Varnashrama.

Young India, 14-10-'26, p. 356

II

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "Hindu and Hinduism")

A correspondent who is a patient and diligent reader of *Young India* writes:

> "Replying to the catechism of 'An Assistant Executive Engineer' in your issue of 14-10-'26 you say : 'In a concrete manner he *is a Hindu who believes in God,* immortality of the soul', etc.
>
> "On reading this I am tempted to confront you with your own writings of nearly two years ago. In *Young India* of April 24, 1924, p. 136, you wrote, 'If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after Truth through non-violent means. *A man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu.* Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after Truth.' "*

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*The full extract from the article referred to above which appeared originally under the title "What Is Hinduism?" is as follows:

"It is the good fortune or the misfortune of Hinduism that it has no official creed. In order therefore to protect myself against any misunderstanding, I have said truth and non-violence is my creed. If I were asked to define the Hindu creed I should simply say: search after truth through non-violent means. A man may not believe even in God and still

The italics in both quotations are mine.

I am surprised that the correspondent does not see the distinction between the two statements. One refers to a Hindu in a concrete manner. Denial of the existence of God is not a characteristic of Hinduism. Millions of Hindus do believe in God. Therefore one may say 'there are Hindus who believe in God, etc.' But 'a man may not believe in God and still call himself a Hindu'. In the second case I have attempted an exhaustive definition. In the first case, I have given a fairly general illustratioin. I, therefore, see no conflict between the two positions.

Young India, 28-10'26, p. 372

3
TWO ASPECTS OF HINDUISM

(From "The Do or Die Mission" by Pyarelal)

Gandhiji while in detention at Aga Khan Palace once remarked to Shri Pyarelal as under :

"There are two aspects of Hinduism. There is on the one hand the historical Hinduism with its untouchability, superstitious worship of stocks and stones, animal sacrifice and so on. On the other, we have the Hinduism of the Gita, the Upanishads and Patanjali's Yogasutras which is the acme of Ahimsa and oneness of all creation, pure worship of one immanent, formless, imperishable God. Ahimsa which to me is the chief glory of Hinduism has been sought to be explained away by our people as being meant for Sannyasis only. I do not share that view. I have held that it is the way of life and India has to show it to the world."

Harijan, 8-12-'46, p. 432

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call himself a Hindu. Hinduism is a relentless pursuit after truth and if today it has become moribund, inactive, irresponsive to growth, it is because we are fatigued and as soon as the fatigue is over, Hinduism will burst forth upon the world with a brilliance perhaps unknown before. Of course, therefore, Hinduism is the most tolerant of all religions. Its creed is all-embracing."

4
HINDUISM ABHORS STAGNATION

(Originally appeared under the title "Hinduism of Today")

A correspondent styling himself "Sanatani Hindu' writes :

"Hinduism of today presents many a curious anomaly. No one cares to study it. . . . Those reputed as the most religious do not follow the Shastras in every detail.

"There is no definite body of doctrines or practices which may be called Sanatana and should be respected and observed as such. Every Hindu regards his own provincial usage as the Sanatan usage."

* * *

The letter presents only one side of the case. There is reason for the correspondent's complaint. But Hinduism is a living organism liable to growth and decay, and subject to the laws of Nature. One and indivisible at the root it has grown into a vast tree with innumerable branches. The changes in the seasons affect it. It has its autumn and summer, its winter and spring. The rains nourish and fructify it too. It is and is not based on scriptures. It does not derive its authority from one book. The Gita is universally accepted, but even then it only shows the way. It has hardly any effect on custom. Hinduism is like the Ganges pure and unsullied at its source, but taking in its course the impurities in the way. Even like the Ganges it is beneficent in its total effect. It takes a provincial form in every province, but the inner substance is retained everywhere. Custom is not religion. Custom may change, but religion will remain unaltered.

Purity of Hinduism depends on the self-restraint of its votaries. Wherever their religion has been in danger, the Hindus have undergone rigorous penance, searched the causes of the danger and devised means for combating them. The Shastras are ever growing. The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis, Puranas and Itihasas did not arise at one and the same time. Each grew out

of the necessities of particular periods, and therefore, they seem to conflict with one another. These books do not enunciate anew the eternal truths but show how these were practised at the time to which the books belong. A practice which was good enough in a particular period would, if blindly repeated in another, land people into the 'slough of despond'. Because the practice of animal sacrifice obtained at one time, shall we revive it today? Because at one time, we used to chop off the hands and feet of thieves, shall we revive that barbarity today? Shall we revive polyandry? Shall we revive child-marriages? Because we discarded a section of humanity one day, shall we brand their descendants today as out-castes?

Hinduism abhors stagnation. Knowledge is limitless and so also the application of truth. Every day we add to our knowledge of the powers of Atman, and we shall keep on doing so. New experience will teach us new duties, but truth shall ever be the same. Who has ever known it in its entirety? The Vedas represent the truth, they are infinite. But who has known them in their entirety? What goes today by the name of Vedas are not even a millionth part of the real Veda — the Book of Knowledge. And who knows the entire meaning of even the few books that we have? Rather than wade through these infinite complications, our sages taught us to learn one thing: 'As with the Self, so with the Universe.' It is not possible to scan the universe, as it is to scan the self. Know the self and you know the universe. But even knowledge of the self within presupposes ceaseless striving — not only ceaseless but pure, and pure striving presupposes a pure heart, which in its turn depends on the practice of Yamas* and Niyamas — the cadinal and casual virtues.

**Yamas,* the cardinal virtues according to Yogashastra are *Ahimsa* (Non-violence), *Satya* (Truth), *Asteya* (Non-stealing), *Brahmacharya* (Celibacy), *Aparigraha* (Non-possession); and the *Niyamas* or the casual virtues are, according to the same authority, *Shaucha* (Bodily purity), *Santosha* (Contentment), *Tapas* (Forbearance), *Swadhyaya* (Study of scriptures), *Ishwara Pranidhana* (Resignation to the Will of God). —M. D.

The practice is not possible without God's grace which presupposes faith and devotion. This is why Tulasidas sang of the glory of Ramanama, that it is why the author of the Bhagavata taught the *Dwadashamantra (Om Namo Bhagwate Vasudevaya).* To my mind he is a Sanatani Hindu who can repeat this *mantra* from the heart. All else is a bottomless pit, as the sage Akho* has said.

Young India, 8-4-'26, p. 131

5
WHAT HAS HINDUSTAN DONE FOR US?

(From "Brahmana-Non-Brahmana Question" — by M. D.)

Q.: We see you swear by Hinduism. May we know what Hinduism has done for us? Is it not a legacy of ugly and superstitious practices?

Gandhiji replied to the above question which was put to him after his talk at one of the places during his tour in South India as follows :

"I thought I had made it clear already. Varnashramadharma itself is a unique contribution of Hinduism to the world. Hinduism has saved us from *bhaya,* i.e. peril. If Hinduism had not come to my rescue, the only course for the me would have been suicide. I remain a Hindu because Hinduism is a leaven which makes the world worth living in. From Hinduism was born Buddhism. What we see today is not pure Hinduism, but often a parody of it. Otherwise it would require no pleading from me in its behalf, but would speak for itself, even as if I was absolutely pure I would not need to speak to you. God does not speak with His tongue, and man, in the measure that he comes near God, becomes like God. Hinduism teaches me that my body is a limitation of the power of the soul within.

"Just as in the West they have made wonderful discoveries in things material, similarly Hinduism had made still more marvellous discoveries in things of religion, of the

*A poet-seer of Gujarat

spirit, of the soul. But we have no eye for these great and fine discoveries. We are dazzled by the material progress that Western science has made. I am not enamoured of that progress. In fact, it almost seems as though God in His wisdom had prevented India from progressing along those lines so that it might fulfil its special mission of resisting the onrush of materialism. After all, there is something in Hinduism that has kept it alive up till now. It has witnessed the fall of Babylonian, Syrian, Persian and Egyptian civilization. Cast a look round you. Where is Rome and where is Greece? Can you find today anywhere the Italy of Gibbon, or rather the ancient Rome, for Rome was Italy? Go to Greece. Where is the world-famous Attic civilization? Then come to India, let one go through the most ancient records and then look round you and you would be constrained to say, 'Yes, I see here ancient India still living.' True, there are dung-heaps too, here and there, but there are rich treasures buried under them. And the reason why it has survived is that the end which Hinduism set before it was not development along material but spiritual lines.

"Among its many contributions the idea of man's identity with the dumb creation is a unique one. To me cow-worship is a great idea which is capable of expansion. Its freedom from the modern proselytization is also to me a precious thing. It needs no preaching. It says, 'Live the life.' It is my business, it is your business to live the life, and then we will leave its influence on ages. Then take its contribution in men; Ramanuja, Chaitanya, Ramkrishna, not to speak of the more modern names, have left their Impress on Hinduism. Hinduism is by no means a spent force or a dead religion.

"Then there is the contribution of the four Ashramas, again a unique contribution. There is nothing like it in the whole world. The Catholics have the order of celibates corresponding to *Brahmacharis*, but not as an institution, whereas in India every boy had to go through the first Ashrama. What a grand conception it was! Today our eyes are dirty, thoughts dirtier and bodies dirtiest of all, because we are denying Hinduism.

"There is yet another thing I have not mentioned. Max Muller said forty years ago that it was dawning on Europe that transmigration is not a theory, but a fact. Well, it is entirely the contribution of Hinduism.

"Today Varnashramadharma and Hinduism are misinterpreted and denied by its votaries. The remedy is not destruction, but correction. Let us reproduce in ourselves the true Hindu spirit, and then ask whether it satisfies the soul or not."

Young India, 24-11-'27, p. 390 at p. 396

6
WHY SHOULD A HINDU CLING TO HINDUISM ?

(From "True Inwardness")

Q.: What is the speciality of Hinduism for which a Hindu need cling to it?

A.: This is an invidious question. Perhaps it is also profitless. But I must answer it, if only to show what I mean by religion. The closest, though very incomplete, analogy for religion I can find is marriage. It is or used to be an indissoluble tie. Much more so is the tie of religion. And just as a husband does not remain faithful to his wife, or wife to her husband, because either is conscious of some exclusive superiority of the other over the rest of his or her sex but because of some indefinable but irresistible attraction, so does one remain irresistibly faithful to one's own religion and find full satisfaction in such adhesion. And just as a faithful husband does not need, in order to sustain his faithfulness, to consider other women as inferior to his wife, so does not a person belonging to one religion need to consider others to be inferior to his own. To pursue the analogy still further, even as faithfulness to one's wife does not presuppose blindness to her shortcomings, so does not faithfulness to one's religion. Indeed faithfulness, not blind adherence, demands a keener perception of shortcomings and therefore a livelier sense of the proper remedy for their removal. Taking the view I do of religion, it

is unnecessary for me, to examine the beauties of Hinduism. The reader may rest assured that I am not likely to remain Hindu, if I was not conscious of its many beauties. Only for my purpose they need not be exclusive. My approach to other religions, therefore, is never as a fault-finding critic but as a devotee hoping to find the like beauties in the other religions and wishing to incorporate in my own the good, I may find in them and miss in mine.

Harijan, 12-8-'33, p. 4

7
THE CHIEF VALUE OF HINDUISM

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

An American professor in Comparative Theology on a visit to India to study Indian religions intelligently, asked Gandhiji to tell her in a nut-shell the chief value of Hinduism, as she had been told "that Gandhiji was the life and soul of Hinduism". "It is hardly wise," she said, "to rest content to teach what you can out of books. One must meet the true representatives of these living religion."

Replying to her Gandhiji said : "The chief value of Hinduism lies in holding the actual belief that *all* life (not only human beings, but all sentient beings) is one, i.e. all life coming from the one universal source, call it Allah, God or Parameshwara. There is in Hinduism a scripture called Vishnusahasranama which simply means 'one thousand names of God'. These one thousand names do not mean that God is limited to those names, but that He has as many names as you can possibly give Him. You may give Him as many names as you like, provided it is one God without a second, whose name you are invoking. That also means that He is nameless too.

"The unity of *all* life is a peculiarity of Hinduism which confines salvation not to human beings alone but says that it is possible for all God's creatures. It may be that it is not possible, save through the human form, but that does not make man the lord of creation. It makes him the servant of God's

creation. Now when we talk of brotherhood of man, we stop there, and feel that all other life is there for man to exploit for his own purposes. But Hinduism excludes all exploitation. There is no limit whatsoever to the measure of sacrifice that one may make in order to realize this oneness with all life, but certainly the immensity of the ideal sets a limit to your wants. That you will see, is the antithesis of the position of the modern civilization which says : 'Increase your wants.' Those who hold that belief think that increase of wants means an increase of knowledge whereby you understand the Infinite better. On the contrary Hinduism rules out indulgence and multiplication of wants as these hamper one's growth to the ultimate identity with the Universal Self."

Harijan, 26-12-'36, p. 363 at p. 364

8

DR. AMBEDKAR'S INDICTMENT OF HINDUISM

(Originally appeared under the title "Dr. Ambedkar's Indictment - II")

(Dr. Ambedkar was to have presided in May 1936 at the annual conference of the Jat-Pat-Todak Mandal of Lahore. But the conference itself was cancelled because Dr. Ambedkar's address was found by the Reception Committee to be unacceptable. The author of the address had indicted Hinduism and quoted chapter and verse in proof of his threefold indictment — inhuman conduct itself, the unabashed justification for it on the part of the perpetrators, and the subsequent discovery that the justification was warranted to their scriptures. The questions that Dr. Ambedkar's indictment suggested were:

1. What are the scriptures?

2. Are all the printed texts to be regarded as an integral part of them or is any part of them to be rejected as unauthorized interpolations?

3. What is the answer of such accepted and expurgated scriptures on the question of untouchability, caste, equality of status, inter-dining and inter-marriages?

This all were ably examined by Dr. Ambedkar in his address but there were manifest flaws in Dr. Ambedkar's thesis. A statement of these flaws and Gandhiji's answer to the said three questions are given in the following article.)

The Vedas, Upanishads, Smritis and Puranas including Ramayana and Mahabharata are the Hindu scriptures. Nor is this a finite list. Every age or even generation has added to the list. It follows, therefore, that everything printed or even found handwritten is not scripture. The Smritis, for instance, contain much that can never be accepted as the word of God. Thus many of the texts that Dr. Ambedkar quotes from the Smritis cannot be accepted as authentic. The scriptures properly so-called can only be concerned with eternal verities and must appeal to any conscience, i.e., any heart whose eyes of understanding are opened. Nothing can be accepted as the word of God which cannot be tested by reason or be capable of being spiritually experienced. And even when you have an expurgated edition of the scriptures, you will need their interpretation. Who is the best interpreter? No learned men surely. Learning there must be. But religion does not live by it. It lives in the experiences of its saints and seers, in their lives and sayings. When all the most learned commentators of the scriptures are utterly forgotten, the accumulated experience of the sages and saints will abide and be an inspiration for ages to come.

Caste has nothing to do with religion. It is a custom whose origin I do not know and do not need to know for the satisfication of my spiritual hunger. But I do know that it is harmful both to spiritual and national growth. Varna and Ashrama are institutions which have nothing to do with castes. The law of Varna teaches us that we have each one of us to earn our bread by following the ancestral calling. It defines not our rights but our duties. It necessarily has reference to callings that are conducive to the welfare of humanity and to no other. It also follows that there is no calling too low and none too high. All are good, lawful and absolutely equal in status. The callings of a Brahmana — spiritual teacher — and a scavenger are equal, and their due performance carries equal

merit before God and at one time seems to have carried identical reward before man. Both were entitled to their livelihood and no more. Indeed one traces even now in the villages the faint lines of this healthy operation of the law. Living in Segaon with its population of 600, I do not find a great disparity between the earnings of different tradesmen including Brahmanas. I find too that real Brahmanas are to be found even in these degenerate days who are living on alms freely given to them and are giving freely of what they have of spiritual treasures. It would be wrong and improper to judge the law of Varna by its caricature in the lives of men who profess to belong to a Varna whilst they openly commit a breach of its only operative rule. Arrogation of a superior status by any of the Varnas over another is a denial of the law. And there is nothing in the law of Varna to warrant a belief in untouchability. (The essence of Hinduism is contained in its enunciation of one and only God as Truth and its bold acceptance of Ahimsa as the law of the human family.)

I am aware that my interpretation of Hinduism will be disputed by many besides Dr. Ambedkar. That does not affect my position. It is an interpretation by which I have lived nearly half a century and according to which I have endeavoured to the best of my ability to regulate my life.

In my opinion the profound mistake that Dr. Ambedkar has made in his address is to pick out the texts of doubtful authenticity and value and the state of degraded Hindus who are no fit specimens of the faith they so woefully misrepresent. Judged by the standard applied by Dr. Ambedkar, every known living faith will probably fail.

In his able address, the learned Doctor has overproved his case. Can a religion that was professed by Chaitanya, Jnanadeva, Tukaram, Tiruvalluvar, Ramkrishna Paramhansa, Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Maharshi Devendranath Tagore, Vivekananda and a host of others who might be easily mentioned, be so utterly devoid of merit as is made out in Dr. Ambedkar's address? A religion has to be judged not by its worst specimens but by the best it might have produced. For

that and that alone can be used as the standard to aspire to, if not to improve upon.

Harijan, 18-7-'36, p. 180

9
AS OTHERS SEE US

Here is a letter which has been lying on my file for some time :

> "Your attitude towards religious conversion and particularly the hope you entertain for the Depressed Classes within the fold of Hinduism overlooks the prevalent practices of Hinduism as it exists in India today. It is impossible not to acknowledge the beauty and the sublimity of Hinduism expounded by Vivekananda and Sir S. Radhakrishnan. But is that the Hinduism that is taught to the masses of India or practised by the heads of Hindu religion? What are the millions of the poor Indian people — starving millions as you call them — living in seven lakhs of villages seeking? Their first need is proper food, shelter and clothing so that they may be raised above the level of animals. Are the Depressed Classes anxious for temple entry?
>
> Any religion is judged by its fruits. Here is a contrast. Take the case of the Christian religion, whether Roman Catholics or Protestants. The funds that are collected from the rich and poor are carefully accounted for and repaid in the form of medical and educational service. Religious worship is open to all alike. The number of schools, colleges, dispensaries, hospitals and orphanages admirably served by their religious institution bear eloquent testimony to the quality of faith that is in them. It is not a theology and philosophy which they possess but the self-sacrificing service which they render in abundant measure towards all that is contrast to the service rendered by the temples and *maths.* What are the uses of the wealth of temples and *maths?* Are not these weapons of superstition and oppression? The heads of these *maths* live princely lives with vast endowments, and when they care to stir out there is a huge retinue of palanquins, cars, elephants, camels and a host of

disciples descending on unhappy villages and towns, like locusts, for further collections. Their disciples who are priests are spread like spies throughout the districts, to collect money from the followers of various faiths, Madhvas, Lingayats, Shaivaits and so forth, under pain of excommunication or ostracism. I am informed that there are regular lawyers to collect dues and serve the interests of these religious heads, swamis and gurus. This state of affairs is an oppression worse than popery in its worst days. Not merely the accumulated wealth and the annual collections, which in all these *maths* must amount to several crores, are never properly accounted for, but this gigantic system of ghastly exploitation continues to be supported by the most intellectual leaders of the people as if Hindu society will break up by questioning it. This is practical Hinduism. Why should there be any surprise that the Depressed Classes alone should revolt against a system which denies equal rights to worship the Deity but keeps them also in a perpetual social excommunication? Why is it that no one ventures to question the priestly oppression, this draining away annually the wealth of the people without any service whatever? While the millions are hungry, ignorant and illiterate, even a small proportion of wealth of the *maths* and the temples is not turned to relieve human misery. Hinduism is so spiritual that it will not do it. Are the Hindu gods so ravenous that they require such an annual collection with complete indifference to those who give it? I doubt!

While the produce of the land is steadily drained away as land revenue on the one side by the State and religious extortion of the other, is it any wonder millions are underfed and poverty-stricken? Is it any relief to them to be told to work harder and more systematically in their leisure months after the harvest? What is taken in money and in kind should return to them in the form of a service they most need. If the poor unfortunate masses of India are not supported by the wealth of the Hindu *maths* to shake off their illiteracy, ignorance, hook-worm, malaria, leprosy, diarrohoea, dysentery, cholera, and plague — physical ills which they cannot at present get over

without relief — they will never be capable of bringing greater intelligence to bear upon the resources of Nature. It is exploitation by religious heads that has crushed the people, and the money-lender and the State combined have finished the process. It is not mere work and harder work, and the variety of cottage industries that these half-dead, half-living masses require, but more vocational schools and dispensaries, maternity and child-welfare centres and better food. They have paid for it in full and have been cheated out of the services they ought to get from religion and the State. When will the children of the villages have the light of morning in their eyes? In the process of evolution, to think that all that is dross in Hinduism will drop off like surface excrescence is as much as hoping that all that is vile in the present Government will also do the same by just wishing for it. If the State is not moved very easily by your Herculean endeavours, Hinduism requires a far more drastic purge as it has been established some thousands of years longer than this alien Government. I would rather love the State that renders services of all sorts for the revenue collected than this religion which does nothing.

Bishops and priests of the Christian religion, in spite of the fierce criticism levelled against them in this land and every other country, render humanitarian service unequalled by any other class of human beings who follow any other faith or no faith, and are approachable to all people. Christian missions, far from being wealthy, have become poorer and lost all their Western supporters who today acknowledge the greatness of Hinduism and challenge them to go forth and serve their fellowmen with their own money. If the humanitarian service of the Christian heads are acknowledged, it is far better to give to them some of the resources that are now misused so that with their humane service which the masses sorely need. What has Hinduism done for the villages, the most depressing morbid places under the Sun? Nothing ! Absolutely nothing! Government officials require *bhattha* to visit these places, and no wonder. One would welcome cheerfully the mechanical civilization of the West, but even that under Hindu hands becomes as vile as Bombay *chawls.* Anyone

> with open unprejudiced eyes can see it. You have no objection to accept missionary humanitarian service, and yet will not consider what form of service Hinduism renders with its accumulated wealth in temples and *maths.* When these religious institutions serve the poor regardless of caste, creed or community, instead of exploiting their abysmal superstition, Hinduism will really begin to live."

It is good to see ourselves as others see us. Try as we may, we are never able to know ourselves fully as we are, especially the evil side of us. This we can do only if we are not angry with our critics but will take in good part whatever they might have to say. Any way I propose to examine the forgoing criticism as dispassionately as I can. The grave limitations of Hinduism as it is seen today in practice must be admitted. Many *maths* and their administration are undoubtedly a disgrace to Hinduism. The money that is poured into some of them does not return to the worshippers in the form of service. This state of things must be ended or mended.

Humanitarian work done by Christian mission must also be admitted.

But these admissions of mine must not be interpreted to mean endorsement of the deductions of the writer. Economic and educational relief is required by most poor Indians in common with Harijans. But the latter suffer from special disabilities. It is not a question of what disabilities they resent. It is the duty of the so-called superior Hindus to break the chains that bind the Harijans even though they may hug them. The admission by the writer of the sublimity of Hinduism as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan should have led to his discovery of its percolation down to the masses. I make bold to say that in spite of the crudeness which one sees among the villagers, class considered, in all that is good in human nature they compare favourable with any villagers in the world. The testimony is borne out by the majority of travellers who from the times of Huen Tsang down to the present times have recorded their impressions. The innate culture that the villages of India show, the art which one sees

in the homes of the poor, the restraint with which the villagers conduct themselves, are surely due to the religion that has bound them together from time immemorial.

In his zeal to belittle Hinduism, the writer ignores the broad fact that Hinduism has produced a race of reformers who have successfully combated prejudice, superstitions and abuses. Without any drum-beating Hinduism has devised a system of relief of the poor which has been the envy of many foreign admirers. I myself feel that it leaves much to be desired. It has its evil side. But from the philanthropic standpoint it has wholly justified itself. It is not the Indian habit to advertize charities through printed reports and the like. But he who runs may see the free kitchens and free medical relief given along indigenous lines.

The writer belittles village work. It betrays gross ignorance. If the *maths* and the revenue offices were extinguished and free schools were opened the people would not be cured of their inertia. *Maths* must be reformed, the revenue system must be overhauled, free primary schools must be established in every village. But starvation will not disappear because people pay no revenue and *maths* are destroyed and schools spring up in every village. The greatest education in the villages consists in the villagers being taught or induced to work methodically and profitably all the year round whether it be on the land or at industries connected with the villages.

Lastly, my correspondent seems to resent acceptance by us of humanitarian services by missonaries. Will he have an agitation led against these missionary institutions? Why should they have non-Christian aid? They are established with the view of weaning Indians from their ancestral faith even as expounded by Vivekananda and Radhakrishnan. Let them isolate the institutions from the double purpose. It will be time enough then to expect non-Christian aid. The critic must be aware of the fact that even as it is, some of these institutions do get non-Christian aid. My point is that there should be no complaint if they do not receive such aid so long as they have an aim which is repugnant to the non-Christian sentiment.

Harijan, 6-3-’37, p. 28

10
THE ESSENCE OF HINDUISM

(After the proclamation by the Maharaja of Travancore throwing temples open to Harijans was issued in 1936, Gandhiji went on a tour of Travancore and addressed several public meetings during his tour. At the public meeting in Quilon Gandhiji summed up the credal belief of Hinduism in an Upanishadic *mantra*, and thereafter gave lucid and simple commentaries on the numerous implications of that all comprehensive *mantra*. Accounts of some of these speeches which appeared in "Weekly Letter" by M. D. are given below.)

I

(Speech at Quilon)

Let me for a few moments consider what Hinduism consists of, what it is that has fired so many saints about whom we have historical record. Why has it contributed so many philosophers to the world? What it is in Hinduism that has so enthused its devotees for centuries? Did they see untouchability in Hinduism and still enthuse over it? In the midst of my struggle against untouchability, I have been asked by several workers as to the essence of Hinduism. We have no simple *Kalma*, they said, that we find in Islam, nor have we 3-16 John of the Bible. Have we or have we not something that will answer the demands of the most philosophic among the Hindus or the most matter-of-fact among them? Some have said, and not without good reason, the Gayatri answers that purpose. I have perhaps recited the Gayatri *mantra* a thousand times, having understood the meaning of it. But still it seems to me that it did not answer the whole of my aspirations. Then as you are aware, I have, for years past, been swearing by the Bhagavagita, and have said that it answers all my difficulties and has been my *Kamdhenu,* my guide, my open sesame, on hundreds of moments of doubt and difficulty. I cannot recall a single occasion when it has failed me. But it is not a book that I can place before the whole of this audience. It requires a

prayerful study before the *Kamdhenu* yields the rich milk she holds in her udders.

But I have fixed upon one *mantra* that I am going to recite to you, as containing the whole essence of Hinduism. Many of you, I think, know the Ishopanishad. I read it years ago, with translation and commentary. I learnt it by heart in Yeravda Jail. But it did not then captivate me, as it has done during the past few months, and I have now come to the final conclusion that if all the Upanishads and all the other scriptures happened all of a sudden to be reduced to ashes, and if only the first verse in the Ishopanishad were left intact in the memory of Hindus, Hinduism would live for ever.

Now this *mantra* divides itself in four parts. The first part is ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत्। It means, as I would translate, “All this that we see in this great universe is pervaded by God.' Then come the second and third parts which read together, as I read them: तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथाः। I divide these into two and translate them thus: ‘Renounce it and enjoy it.' There is another rendering which means the same thing, though: ‘Enjoy what He gives you.' Even so you can divide it into two parts. Then follows the final and most important part मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्। which means: ‘Do not covet anybody's wealth or possession.' All the other *mantras* of that ancient Upanishad are a commentary or an attempt to give us the full meaning of the first *mantra*. As I read the *mantra* in the light of the Gita or the Gita in the light of the *mantra* I find that the Gita is a commentary on this *mantra.* It seems to me to satisfy the cravings of the Socialist and the Communist, of the philosopher and the economist. I venture to suggest to all who do not belong to the Hindu faith that it satisfies their cravings also. And if it is true — and I hold it to be true — you need not take anything in Hinduism which is inconsistent with or contrary to the meaning of this *mantra*. What more can a man in the street want to learn than this that the one God and Creator and Master of all that lives pervades the universe? The three other parts of the *mantra* follow directly from the first. If you believe that God pervades everything that He has created,

you must believe that you cannot enjoy anything that is not given by Him. And seeing that He is the Creator of His numberless children, it follows that you cannot covet anybody's possession. If you think that you are one of His numerous creatures, it behoves you to renounce everything and lay it at His feet. That means that the act of renunciation of everything is not a mere physical renunciation but represents a second or new birth. It is a deliberate act, not done in ignorance. It is, therefore, a regeneration. And then since he who holds the body must eat and drink and clothe himself, he must naturally seek all that he needs from Him. And he gets it as a natural reward of that renunciation. As if this was not enough the *mantra* closes with this magnificent thought : Do not covert anybody's possession. The moment you carry out these precepts you become a wise citizen of the world, living at peace with all that lives. It satisfies one's highest aspirations on this earth and hereafter. No doubt it will not satisfy the the aspiration of him who does not believe in God and His undisputed sovereignty. It is not idle thing that the Maharaja of Travancore is called *Padmanabhadas*. It is a great thought, we know that God Himself has taken the title of *Dasanudas* — servant of servants. If all the princes would call themselves servants of God, they would be correctly describing themselves, but they cannot be servants of God unless they are servants of the people. And if zamindars and moneyed men and all who have possessions would treat themselves as trustees and perform the act of renunciation that I have described, this world would indeed be a blessed world to live in.

Harijan, 30-1-'37, p. 403 at p. 404

II

(From the speech at Haripad)

At this meeting I would love to detain you for a few minutes on the message of Hinduism I gave to the meeting in Quilon last night. I ventured at that meeting to say that the whole of Hinduism could be summed up in the first verse of Ishopanishad. I suggested then if all other Hindu scriptures happened to be reduced to ashes and to go out of the memory

of men and if only that one verse to abide with us, the destruction would be no loss. Hinduism would even then remain with us. The original Sanskrit of the *mantra* is perhaps as easy as anybody learning Sanskrit could possibly wish. This Upanishad enjoys the reputation of being part of the original Vedas. It is the shortest Upanishad known to us. But as I have said if we had only the first verse of that Upanishad remaining with us, it would be enough to supply all our wants. Let me repeat that *mantra* in my faulty Sanskrit pronunciation:

ईशावास्यमिदं सर्वं यत्किंच जगत्यां जगत्।
तेन त्यक्तेन भुंजीथाः मा गृधः कस्यस्विद्धनम्॥

Those who know a little bit of Sanskrit will find that there is nothing abstruse there that you find in other Vedic *mantra*s, and its meaning is simply this : All that there is in this universe, great or small, including the tiniest atom, is pervaded by God, known as Creator or Lord. Isha means the Ruler, and He who is the Creator naturally by very right becomes the Ruler too. And here in this verse the seer has chosen no other epithet for the Deity but that of the Ruler, and he has excepted nothing from His jurisdiction. He says, everything that we see is pervaded by the Deity, and from that naturally the other parts of the *mantra* follow. Thus he says, renounce everything, i.e. everything that is on this universe, the whole of the universe and not only this tiny globe of ours, renounce it. He asks us to renounce it as we are such insignificant atoms that if we had any idea of possession it would seem ludicrous. And then, says the Rishi, the reward of renunciation is भुंजीथाः i.e. enjoyment of all you need. But there is a meaning about the word ‘enjoy’ — you might as well say use, eat, etc. — but it means that you may not take more than is necessary for your growth. Therefore, this enjoyment or use is limited by two conditions. One is the act of renunciation or, as the author of the Bhagavat would say, enjoy in the spirit of कृष्णार्पणमस्तु सर्वम्। And every day in the morning everyone who believes in Bhagavatdharma has to dedicate his thoughts, words and deeds to Krishna, and not until he has performed that daily act of renunciation or dedication has he the right of

touching anything or drinking even a cup of water. And when a man has performed that act of renunciation and dedication, he derives from that act the right of eating, drinking, clothing and housing himself to the extent necessary for his daily life. Therefore, take it as you like, either in the sense that the enjoyment or use is the reward of renunciation, or that the renunciation is the condition of enjoyment, renunciation is essential for our very existence, for our soul. And as if that condition given in the *mantra* was incomplete, the Rishi hastened to complete it by adding : 'Do not covet what belongs to another.' Now I suggest to you that the whole of the philosophy or religion found in any part of the world is contained in this *mantra*, and it excludes everything contrary to it. According to the canons of interpretation, anything that is inconsistent with Shruti — and the Ishopanishad is a Shruti — is to be rejected altogether.

Harijan, 30-1-'37, p. 407

III

(From the speech at Kottayam)

Latterly I have been endeavouring to describe to vast assemblages of men and women I have adderssed what I regard as the essence of Hinduism, and I have been suggesting to them one incredibly simple *mantra* of the Ishopanishad, and as you know it is one of the Upanishads that enjoy the sanctity of the Vedas. The very first verse of the Ishopanishad means simply this : God pervades everything that is to be found in this universe down to the tiniest atom. The *mantra* describes God as the Creator, the Ruler, and the Lord. The seer to whom this *mantra* or verse was revealed was not satisfied with the magnificent statement that God was to be found everywhere. But he went further and said : 'Since God pervades everything nothing belongs to you, not even your own body. God is the undisputed, unchallengeable Master of everything you possess.' And so when a person who calls himself a Hindu goes through the process of regeneration or a second birth, as Christians would call it, he has to perform a dedication or renunciation of

all that he has in ignorance called his own property. And then when he has performed this act of dedication or renunciation, he is told that he will win a reward in the shape of God taking good care of what he will require for food, clothing or housing. Therefore, the condition of enjoyment or use of the necessaries of life is their dedication or renunciation. And that dedication or renunciation has got to be done from day to day, lest we may in this busy world forget the central fact of life. And to crown all, the seer says : 'Covet not anybody's riches.' I suggest to you that the truth that is embedded in this very short *mantra* is calculated to satisfy the highest cravings of every human being — whether they have reference to this world or to the next. I have in my search of the scriptures of the world found nothing to add to this *mantra.* Looking back upon all the little I have read of the scriptures — it is precious little I confess — I feel that everything good in all the scriptures is derived from this *mantra*. If it is universal brotherhood — not only brotherhood of all human beings, but of all living beings — I find it in this *mantra*. If it is the unshakable faith in the Lord and Master — and all the adjectives you can think of — I find it in this *mantra*. If it is the idea of complete surrender to God and of the faith that He will supply all that I need, then again I say I find it in this *mantra*. Since He pervades every fibre of my being and of all of you, I derive from it the doctrine of equality of all creatures on earth and it should satisfy the cravings of all philosophical communists. This *mantra* tells me that I cannot hold as mine anything that belongs to God, and if my life and that of all who believe in this *mantra* has to be a life of perfect dedication, it follows that it will have to be a life of continual service of our fellow creatures. This, I say, is my faith and should be the faith of all who call themselves Hindus.

Harijan, 30-1-'37, p. 409

11
MUCH IN LITTLE

> "In Mr. Mahadev Desai's book on the Travancore Temple Entry Proclamation, I find your speeches made in several places in Travancore. You have spoken of the Ishopanishad and said that if the first verse alone survived and all the rest of the Hindu scriptures were destroyed, it would alone save religion from extinction. Perhaps, you know that that verse was a turning point in the life of Devendranath Tagore, the Poet's father. Young Devandranath was in a mood of great depression when his father died leaving the family estate highly encumbered. One day while in this mood a piece of printed paper was wafted by a passing breeze to where he was sitting. He picked it up. It was in Sanskrit which he had not learnt then. He took it to the family pandit who read it out. It was the first verse of the Ishopanishad. 'Nectar poured into my soul', says the Maharshi in his autobiography.
>
> "The phrase about enjoying by renunciation puzzled me for long. One day (or night to be correct) it flashed on me that the phrase but expressed a daily experience. What greater enjoyment is there than renouncing something one values to one — person or cause — which one holds dear?"

The above letter from Shri K. Natarajan was received by me about three months ago. I had hoped to deal with it in these columns much earlier but could not. Nothing, however, is lost for the subject-matter of the letter is an evergreen. I try to the utmost of my ability to live the meaning that, in my ungrammatical way, I have ascribed to the *shloka.* Not being a reader of books, I never knew the instance that Shri Natarajan quotes from Maharshi Devendra's life. It fortifies my belief that the first *mantra* of Ishopanishad is all that undiluted Hinduism — in other words, for me, religion — can have to give. The recitation of the eighteen chapters of the Gita is finished in one week at the morning prayer and so it has gone

on now for some years from week to week. The Gita is a commentary on the first verse of the Ishopanishad. And I feel, not without diffidence, that the interpretation that flashed on Shri Natarajan's mind reveals but the partial truth. As I understand it, his interpretation is only the well-known doctrine of self-sacrifice which is undoubtedly a common enough experience. Take only one instance. Many a mother sacrifices all for her children. But the *mantra* referred to here was not revealed to confirm the truth of that practice, well known even during the remote times when it is said to have been given. To live up to that verse means the new birth enunciated in the New Testament or *Brahmasamarpana* (dedication to God) as taught in Hinduism. The verse, therefore, seems to me to mean only one thing. Recognize that everything you fancy you have is God's and from God and take only what you really need for life. In other words, in the language of the Gita it teaches the doctrine of uttermost detachment. Then only is life worth living.

Harijan, 23-6-'46, p. 189

12
MY CLAIM

(From "Friendly Discussion Always Welcome" which appeared in "Notes")

I am no Sanskrit scholar, but I know sufficient to detect errors in translations that may be given to me. I claim to have read the Shastras to my satisfaction, and I claim to have endeavoured from my youth upwards to put into practice the fundamental precepts of the Shastras. Thus I have no hesitation in putting before the public, with the utmost confidence, the conclusions I have reached regarding certain fundamentals of Hinduism.

Harijan, 12-1-'34, p. 3

13
WHY I AM A HINDU

An American friend who subscribes herself as a life-long friend of India writes:

> "As Hinduism is one of the prominent religions of the East, and as you have made a study of Christianity and Hinduism, and on the basis of that study, have announced that you are a Hindu, I beg leave to ask of you if you will do me the favour to give me your reasons for that choice. Hindus and Christians alike realize that man's chief need is to know God and to worship Him in spirit and in truth. Believing that Christ was a revelation of God, Christians of America have sent to India thousands of their sons and daughters to tell the people of India about Christ. Will you in return kindly give us your interpretation of Hinduism and make a comparison of Hinduism with the teaching of Christ? I will be deeply grateful for this favour."

I have ventured at several missionary meetings to tell English and American missionaries that if they could have refrained from 'telling' India about Christ and had merely lived the life enjoined upon them by the Sermon on the Mount, India, instead of suspecting them, would have appreciated their living in the midst of her children and directly profited by their presence. Holding this view, I can 'tell' American friends nothing about 'Hinduism' by way of 'return'. I do not believe in telling others of their faith, especially with a view to conversion. Faith does not admit of telling. It has to be lived and then it becomes self-propagating.

Nor do I consider myself fit to interpret Hinduism except through my own life. And If I may not interpret Hinduism through my written word, I may not compare it with Christianity. The only thing it is possible for me therefore to do is say as briefly as I can, why I am a Hindu.

Believing as I do in the influence of heredity, being born in a Hindu family, I have remained a Hindu. I should reject it,

if I found it inconsistent with my moral sense or my spiritual growth. On examination I have found it to be the most tolerant of all religions known to me. Its freedom from dogma makes a forcible appeal to me in as much it gives the votary the largest scope for self-expression. Not being an exclusive religion, it enables the followers of that faith not merely to respect all the other religions, but it also enables them to admire and assimilate whatever may be good in the other faiths. Non-violence is common to all religions, but it has found the highest expression and application in Hinduism. (I do not regard Jainism or Buddhism as separate from Hinduism.) Hinduism believes in the oneness not of merely all human life but in the oneness of all that lives. Its worship of the cow is, in my opinion, its unique contribution to the evolution of humanitarianism. It is a practical application of the belief in the oneness and, therefore, sacredness, of all life. The great belief in transmigration is a direct consequence of that belief. Finally the discovery of the law of Varnashrama is a magnificent result of the ceaseless search for truth. I must not burden this article with definitions of the essentials sketched here, except to say that the present ideas of cow-worship and Varnashrama are a caricature of what, in my opinion, the originals are. The curious may see the definitions of cow-worship and Varnashrama in the previous numbers of *Young India*. I hope to have to say on Varnashrama in the near future. In this all too brief a sketch I have mentioned what occur to me to be the outstanding features of Hinduism that keep me in its fold.

Young India, 20-10-'27, p. 352

14
HINDUISM AS I UNDERSTAND

(Extract from "Cow Protection")

I claim to be a Sanatani Hindu. People may laugh and say that to call myself a Sanatani Hindu when I eat and drink from the hands of Musalmans and Christians, keep an untouchable girl in my house as my daughter and do not hesitate to quote the Bible, is nothing short of doing violence to language. But I would still adhere to my claim, for I have faith in me which tells me that a day would come — may be most probably after I am dead and no longer present in this world in the flesh to bear witness — when my critics would recognize their error and admit the justness of my claim. Pretty long while ago, I once wrote in *Young India* an article on Hinduism, which I consider to be one of my most thoughtful writings on the subject. The definition of Hinduism which I gave in it is probably the clearest that I have ever given. After defining a Hindu as one who believed in the Vedas and Upanishads, recited the Gayatri and subscribed to the doctrine of rebirth and transmigration etc., I added that so far as the popular notion of Hinduism was concerned, its distinguishing feature was belief in cow-protection and reverence for the cow. I do not want to be told as to what Hindus ten thousand years ago did. I know there are scholars who tell us that cow-sacrifice is mentioned in the Vedas. I remember when I was a high school student we read a sentence in our Sanskrit text-book to the effect that the Brahmanas of old used to eat beef. That exercised my mind greatly and I used to wonder and ask myself whether what was written could be after all true. But as I grew up the conviction slowly forced itself upon me that even if the text on which these statements were based was actually part of the Vedas, the interpretation put upon it could not be correct. I had conceived of another way out of the difficulty. This was purely for personal satisfaction. 'If the Vedic text under reference was incapable of bearing any other

interpretation than the literal,' I said to myself, 'the Brahmanas who were alleged to be eating beef had the power to bring the slaughtered animals back to life again.' But that is neither here nor there. The speculation does not concern the general mass of the Hindus. I do not claim to be a Vedic scholar. I have read Sanskrit scriptures largely in translation. A layman like myself, therefore, can hardly have any *locus standi* in a controversy like this. But I have confidence in myself. Therefore I do not hesitate to freely express to others my opinions based on my inner experience. It may be that we may not be all able to agree as to the exact meaning and significance of cow protection. For Hinduism does not rest on the authority of one book or one prophet; nor does it possess a common creed — like the Kalma of Islam — acceptable to all. That renders a common definition of Hiduism a bit difficult, but therein lies its strength also. For, it is this special feature that has given to Hinduism its inclusive and assimilative character and made its gradual, silent evolution possible. Go to any Hindu child and he would tell you that cow protection is the supreme duty of every Hindu and that any one who does not believe in it hardly deserves the name of a Hindu.

Young India, 29-1-'25. p. 37

15
MY MEANING OF SANATANA HINDUISM

(Originally appeared under the title "Hinduism")

In dealing with the problem of untouchability during the Madras tour, I have asserted my claim to being a Sanatani Hindu with greater emphasis than hitherto, and yet there are things which are commonly done in the name of Hinduism, which I disregard. I have no desire to be called a Sanatani Hindu or any other if I am not such. And I have certainly no desire to steal in a reform or an abuse under cover of a great faith.

It is, therefore, necessary for me once for all distinctly to give my meaning of Sanatana Hinduism. The word 'Sanatana' I use in its natural sense.

I call myself a Sanatani Hindu because,

(1) I believe in the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Puranas and all that goes by the name of Hindu scriptures, and therefore in *avataras* and rebirth,

(2) I believe in the Varnashramadharma in a sense in my opinion strictly Vedic but not in its present popular and crude sense,

(3) I believe in the protection of the cow in its much larger sense than the popular,

(4) I do not disbelieve in idol-worship.

The reader will note that I have purposely refrained from using the word 'divine origin' in reference to the Vedas or any other scriptures. For I do not believe in the exclusive divinity of the Vedas. I believe the Bible, the Koran, and the Zend-Avesta to be as much divinely inspired as the Vedas. My belief in the Hindu scriptures does not require me to accept every word and every verse as divinely inspired. Nor do I claim to have any first-hand knowledge of these wonderful books. But I do not claim to know and feel the truths of the essential teaching of the scriptures. I decline to be bound by any interpretation, however learned it may be, if it is repugnant to reason or moral sense. I do not most emphatically repudiate the claim (if they advance any such) of the present Shankaracharyas and Shastris to give a correct interpretation of the Hindu scriptures. On the contrary, I believe that our present knowledge of these books is in a most chaotic state. I believe implicitly in the Hindu aphorism, that no one truly knows the Shastras who has not attained perfection in Innocence (Ahimsa), Truth *(satya)* and Self-control *(brahmacharya)* and who has not renounced all acquisition or possession of wealth. I believe in the institution of gurus, but in this age millions must go without a guru, because it is a rare thing to find a combination of perfect purity and perfect learning. But one need not despair of ever knowing the truth of one's religion, because the fundamentals of Hinduism as of every great religion are unchangeable, and easily understood. Every Hindu believes in God and His oneness; in rebirth and salvation. But

that which distinguishes Hinduism from every other religion is its cow protection, more than its Varnashrama.

Varnashrama is in my opinion inherent in human nature, and Hinduism has simply reduced it to a science. It does attach to birth. A man cannot change his Varna by choice. Not to abide by one's Varna is to disregard the law of heredity. The division, however, into innumerable castes is an unwarranted liberty taken with the doctrine. The four divisions are all-sufficing.

I do not believe that inter-dining or even inter-marriage necessarily deprives a man of his status that his birth has given him. The four divisions define a man's calling, they do not restrict or regulate social intercourse. The divisions define duties, they confer no privileges. It is, I hold, against the genius of Hinduism to arrogate to oneself a higher status or assign to another a lower. All are born to serve God's creation, a Brahmana with his knowledge, a Kshatriya with his power of protection, a Vaishya with his commercial ability and a Shudra with his bodily labour. This however does not mean that a Brahmana, for instance, is absolved from bodily labour, or the duty of protecting himself and others. His birth makes a Brahmana predominantly a man of knowledge, the fittest by heredity and training to impart it to others. There is nothing, again, to prevent the Shudra from acquiring all the knowledge he wishes. Only, he will best serve with his body and need not envy others their special qualities for service. But a Brahmana who claims superiority by right of knowledge falls and has no knowledge. And so with the others who pride themselves upon their special qualities. Varnashrama is self-restraint and conservation and economy of energy.

* * *

Unfortunately today Hinduism seems to consist merely in eating and not eating. Once I horrified a pious Hindu by taking toast at a Musalman's house. I saw that he was pained to see me pouring milk into a cup handed by a Musalman friend, but his anguish knew no bounds when he saw me taking toast at the Musalman's hands. Hinduism is in danger of losing its

substance if it resolves itself into a matter of elaborate rules as to what and with whom to eat. Abstemiousness from intoxicating drinks and drugs, and from all kinds of foods, especially meat, is undoubtedly a great aid to the evolution of the spirit, but it is by no means an end in itself. Many a man eating meat and with everybody, but living in the fear of God is nearer his freedom than a man religiously abstaining from meat and many other things but blaspheming God in every one of his acts.

The central fact of Hinduism is however cow protection. Cow protection to me is one of the most wonderful phenomena in human evolution. It takes the human being beyond his species. The cow to me means the entire sub-human world. Man through the cow is enjoined to realize his identity with all that lives. Why the cow was selected for apotheosis is obvious to me. The cow was in India the best companion. She was the giver of plenty. Not only did she give milk, but she also made agriculture possible. The cow is a poem of pity. One reads pity in the gentle animal. She is the mother to millions of Indian mankind. Protection of the cow means protection of the whole dumb creation of God. The ancient seer, whoever he was, began with the cow. The appeal of the lower order of creation is all the more forcible because it is speechless. Cow protection is the gift of Hinduism to the world, And Hinduism will live so along as there are Hindus to protect the cow.

The way to protect is to die for her. It is a denial of Hinduism and Ahimsa to kill a human being to protect a cow. Hindus are enjoined to protect the cow by their *tapasya,* by self-purification, by self-sacrifice. The present day cow protection has degenerated into a perpetual feud with the Musalmans, whereas cow protection means conquering the Musalmans by our love. A Musalman friend sent me sometime ago a book detailing the inhumanities practised by us on the cow and her progeny. How we bleed her to take the last drop of milk from her, how we starve her to emaciation, how we ill-treat the calves, how we deprive them of their portion of milk, how cruelly we treat the oxen, how we castrate them, how we

beat them, how we overload them. If they had speech they would bear witness to our crimes against them which would stagger the world. By every act of cruelty to our cattle, we disown God and Hinduism. I do not know that the condition of the cattle in any other part of the world is so bad as in unhappy India. We may not blame the Englishman for this. We may not plead poverty in our defence. Criminal negligence is the only cause of the miserable condition of our cattle. Our *panjarapols* though they are an answer to our instinct of mercy, are a clumsy demonstration of its execution. Instead of being model dairy farms and great profitable national institutions, they are merely depots for receiving decrepit cattle.

Hindus will not be judged by their *tilaks,* not by the correct chanting of *mantras,* not by their pilgrimages, not by their most punctilious observance of caste rules but by their ability to protect the cow. Whilst professing the religion of cow protection, we have enslaved the cow and her progeny, and have become slaves ourselves.

It will now be understood why I consider myself a Sanatani Hindu....

I can no more describe my feeling for Hinduism than for my own wife. She moves me as no other woman in the world can. Not that she has no faults. I dare say she has many more than I see myself. But the feeling of an indissoluble bond is there. Even so I feel for and about Hinduism with all its faults and limitations. Nothing elates me so much as the music of the Gita or the Ramayana by Tulasidas, the only two books in Hinduism I may be said to know. When I fancied I was taking my last breath, the Gita was my solace. I know the vice that is going on today in all the great Hindu shrines, but I love them in spite of their unspeakable failings. There is an interest which I take in them and which I take in no other. I am a reformer through and through. But my zeal never takes me to the rejection of any of the essential things of Hinduism. I have said I do not disbelieve in idol-worship. An idol does not excite any feeling of veneration in me. But I think that idol-worship is part of human nature. We hanker after symbolism.

Why should one be more composed in a church than elsewhere? Images are an aid to worship. No Hindu considers an image to be God. I do not consider idol-worship a sin.

It is clear from the foregoing, that Hinduism is not an exclusive religion. In it there is room for worship of all the prophets of the world. It is not a missionary religion in the ordinary sense of the term. It has no doubt absorbed many tribes in its fold, but this absorption has been of an evolutionary, imperceptible character. Hinduism tells every one to worship God according to his own faith or Dharma, and so it lives at peace with all religions.

That being my conception of Hinduism, I have never been able to reconcile myself to untouchability. I have always regarded it as an excrescence. It is true that it has been handed down to us from generations but so are many evil practices even to this day. I should be ashamed to think, that dedication of girls to virtual prostitution was a part of Hinduism. Yet it is practised by Hindus in many parts of India. I consider it positive irreligion to sacrifice goats to Kali and do not consider it a part of Hinduism. Hinduism is a growth of ages. The very name, Hinduism, was given to the religion of the people of Hindusthan by foreigners. There was, no doubt, at one time sacrifice of animals offered in the name of religion. But it is not religion, much less is it Hindu religion. And so also it seems to me, that when cow protection became an article of faith with our ancestors, those persisted in eating beef were excommunicated. The civil strife must have been fierce. Social boycott was applied not only to recalcitrants, but their sins were visited upon their children also. The practice which had probably its origin in good intentions hardened into usage, and even verses crept into our sacred books giving the practice a permanence wholly undeserved and still less justified. Whether my theory is correct or not, untouchability is repugnant to reason and to the instinct of mercy, pity or love. A religion that establishes the worship of the cow cannot possibly countenance or warrant a cruel and inhuman boycott of human beings. And I should be content to be torn to pieces rather than disown the

suppressed classes. Hindus will certainly never deserve freedom nor get it if they allow their noble religion to be disgraced by the retention of the taint of untouchability. And as I love Hinduism dearer than life itself, the taint has become for me an intolerable burden. Let us not deny God by denying to a fifth of our race the right of association on an equal footing.

Young India, 6-10-'21, p. 317

16
IS THERE SATAN IN HINDUISM ?

A correspondent writes :

"A few months back under a heading not quite justified by its contents you published a letter of mine concerning certain religious systems and the belief in God. (See *Young India,* 1925, p. 155.) Now I am tempted to put you a question concerning His adversary (according to Semitic beliefs), whose name you are so often using in your writings and speeches; — not of course without effect, as witness the article 'Snares of Satan' in your issue of 6-8-'25. If it was only rhetorical effect that was intended thereby, because you were writing or speaking in the language of a people who have been taught to believe in Satan's existence through the Semitic creed of Christianity, then I would have nothing to say. But the article cited, among other things, does seem to point to a belief on your part in Satan's existence, — a belief, in my humble opinion, quite un-Hindu. Asked by Arjuna what was the cause of man's continual fall, Shri Krishana said : '*Kama esha Krodha esha*'. etc. (It is lust, it is anger). According to Hindu belief, it would seem, the Tempter is no person outside of us, — nor indeed is it *one;* for there are 'the six enemies' of man enumerated in the Shastras: *Kam*a or lust, *krodha* or anger, *lobha* or greed, *moha* or infatuation, *mada* or pride, and *matsara*, i.e. envy or jealousy. So it is clear, Hinduim has no place for Satan, the Fallen Angel, the Tempter, or as he has been called by a French writer (Anatole France), 'God's man-of-affairs! How is it then that you who are a Hindu speak and write as if you believed in the real existence of the old one?"

This correspondent is well known to the readers of *Young India*. He is too wide-awake not to know the sense in which I could use the word Satan. But I have observed in him a disposition to draw me out on many matters about which there is a likelihood of the slightest misunderstanding or about which a greater elucidation may be considered necessary. In my opinion the beauty of Hinduism lies in its all-embracing inclusiveness. What the divine author of the Mahabharata said of his great creation is equally true of HInduism. What of substance is contained in any other religion is always to be found in Hinduism. And what is not contained in it is insubstantial or unnecessary. I do believe that there is room for Satan in Hinduism. The Biblical conception is neither new nor original. Satan is not a personality even in the Bible. Or he is as much a personality in the Bible as Ravana or the whole brood of the *asuras* is in Hinduism. I no more believe in a historical Ravana with ten heads and twenty arms than in a historial Satan. And even as Satan and his companions are fallen angels, so are Ravana and his companions fallen angels, or call them gods, if you will. If it be a crime to clothe evil passions and ennobling thoughts in personalities, it is a crime for which perhaps Hinduism is the most responsible. For are not the six passions referred to by my correspondent, and nameless others, embodied in Hinduism? Who or what is Dhritarashtra and his hundred sons? To the end of time imagination, that is, poetry, will play a useful and necessary part in the human evolution. We shall continue to talk of passions as if they were persons. Do they not torment us as much as evil persons? Therefore, as in innumerable other things in the matter under notice the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life.

Young India, 17-9-’25, p. 324

SECTION TWO :
THE FORCE THAT SUSTAINS THE UNIVERSE

17
A HIGHER LAW

(Originally appeared in "Notes")

Having read the article "God is" in *Young India* (11-10-1928) a reader sends the following bracing quotations from Emerson :

> "A little consideration of what takes place around us everyday would show us, that a higher law than that of our will regulate events; that our painful labours are unnecessary and fruitless; that only in our easy, simple, spontaneous action are we strong and by contenting ourselves with obedience we become divine. Belief and love — a believing love will relieve us of a vast load of care. O my brothers, God exists. There is a soul at the centre of Nature, and over the will of every man, so that none of us can wrong the universe.
>
> "The lesson is forcibly taught that our life might be much easier and simpler than we make it, that the world might be a happier place than it is; that there is no need of struggles, convulsions, and despairs, of the wringing of the hands and the gnashing of teeth; that we miscreate our own evils. We interfere with the optimism of nature."

If we would but have a little faith we would see God and His love everywhere about us.

Young India, 15-11-'28, p. 380.

18
GOD IS

Correspondents often invite me to answer in these pages questions about God. That is the penalty I have to pay for what an English friend calls the God stunt in *Young India*. Whilst I am unable to notice all such questions in these columns, the following compels an answer:

> "I read your *Young India* of 12-5-1927, p. 149, where you write, 'I think it is wrong to expect certainties in this world where all else but God that is Truth is an uncertainty.'
>
> "*Young India,* p. 152 : 'God is long-suffering and patient. He lets the tyrant dig his own grave only issuing grave warnings at stated intervals.'
>
> "I humbly beg to say that God is not a certainty. His goal ought to be to spread truth all round. Why does He allow the world to be populated by bad people of various shades? Bad people with their unscrupulousness flourish all round and they spread contagion and thus transmit immorality and dishonesty to posterity.
>
> "Should not God, omniscient and omnipotent as He is, know where wickedness is by His omniscience and kill wickedness by His omnipotence there and then and nip all rascality in the bud and not allow wicked people to flourish?
>
> "Why should God be long-suffering and be patient? What influence can He wield if He be so? The world goes on with all its rascality and dishonesty and tyranny.
>
> "If God allows a tyrant to dig his own grave, why should He not weed out a tyrant before his tyranny oppresses the poor? Why allow full play to tyranny and then allow a tyrant, after his tyranny has ruined and demoralized thousands of people, to go to his grave?
>
> "The world continues to be as bad as it ever was. Why have faith in that God who does not use His powers to change the world and make it a world of good and righteous men?
>
> "I know vicious men with their vices living long and healthy lives. Why should not vicious men die early as a result of their vices.

> "I wish to believe in God but there is no foundation for my faith. Kindly enlighten me through *Young India* and change my disbelief into belief."

The argument is as old as Adam. I have no original answer to it. But I permit myself to state why I believe. I am prompted to do so because of the knowledge that there are young men who are interested in my views and doings.

There is an indefinable mysterious Power that pervades everything. I feel it, though I do not see it. It is this unseen Power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my sense. It transcends the senses.

But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why and how he rules. And yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules. In my tour last year in Mysore, I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some god ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler, I, who am infinitely lesser than God than they than their ruler, need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God, the King of kings. Nevertheless I do feel as the poor villagers felt about Mysore that there is orderliness in the Universe, there is an unalterable Law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living beings and thanks to the marvellous researches of Sir J. C. Bose, it can now be proved that even matter is life. That Law then which governs all life is God. Law and the Law-giver are one. I may not deny the Law or the Law-giver, because I know so little about It or Him. Even as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing, so will not my denial of God and His Law liberate me from its operation; whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.

I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is

ever changing, ever dying, there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power or spirit is God. And since nothing else I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.

And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent. For I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists. Hence I gather that God is Life, Truth, Light. He is Love. He is the supreme Good.

But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express Himself in every the smallest act of His votary. This can only be done through a definite realization more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be, often are, false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.

Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself.

This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith. And since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law, the law of truth and love. Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contray to Truth and Love.

But the foregoing does not answer the correspondent's argument. I confess to him that I have no argument to convince him through reason. Faith transcends reason. All I can advise him to do is not to attempt the impossible. I cannot account for the existence of evil by any rational method. To want to do so is to be co-equal with God. I am therefore humble enough to

recognize evil as such. And I call God long suffering and patient precisely because He permits evil in the world. I know that He has no evil in Him, and yet if there is evil, He is the author of it and yet untouched by it. I know too that I shall never know God if I do not wrestle with and against evil even at the cost of life itself. I am fortified in the belief by my own humble and limited experience. The purer I try to become, the nearer I feel to be to God. How much more should I be, when my faith is not a mere apology as it is today but has become immovable as the Himalayas and as white and bright as snows on their peaks? Meanwhile I invite the correspondent to pray with Newman who sang from experience:

Lead, kindly light, amid the encircling gloom,
Lead Thou me on;
The night is dark and I am far from home,
Lead Thou me on;
Keep Thou my feet, I do not ask to see
The distant scene; one step enough for me.

Young India, 11-10-'28, p. 340

19
DEFINITIONS OF GOD

(Originally appeared under the title "Is there God?")

To,

The Editor,
Young India

Sir,

With reference to your article "God and Congress", I beg to say that while the Charvak school was materialistic out and out, Buddhism is silent on and Jainism doubts the existence of Ishwara or any supernatural Entity that may be said to correspond to God, although both faiths believe in the transmission of the soul and the Law of Karma, in common with Hinduism. (Your friend Prof. Dharmanand Kosambi whom I mentioned may be consulted on this point.) Buddha with Karma, and Jina with Karma respectively may be said to take the place of God in the ritual practice of those two religions.

Of modern religious movements, the Deva Samaj of the Punjab which is mostly a humanitarian and social-service body and lays great store by Ahimsa is (I believe) frankly atheistic in its creed, but *not* materialistic. I have read that it believes neither in God nor gods. In the light of this, its name of Deva Samaj appears rather paradoxical *Lucus a non lucendo!*

Of Bradlaugh you say that his denial of God was a denial of Him as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. Was this denial inclusive, or was it exclusive, of that 'certain unmistakable sameness' behind all that variety of definitions which there would be if we could all give our own definitions of God, as you say? I presume, it cannot be the latter, for Bradlaugh was learned and observant enough. If the former is the case, what made Bradlaugh deny the existence of God even in the aspect of that 'unmistakable sameness'?

I doubt not but that the following excerpt will be of some interest to you in this connection:

> "The very idea of a god, as creating or in any way ruling the world, is utterly absent in the Buddhist system. God is not so much as denied; he is simply not known. Contrary to the opinion once confidently and generally held, that a nation of atheists never existed, it is no longer to be disputed that the numerous Buddhist nations are essentially atheist; for they know no beings with greater supermatural power than any man is supposed capable of attaining to by virtue, austerity, and science; and a remarkable indication of this startling face is to be seen in the circumstances, that some at least of the Buddhist nations — the Chinese, Mongols and Tibetans — have no word in their language to express the notion of God. The future condition of the Buddhist, then, is not assigned him by the Ruler of the universe; the 'Karma' of his actions determines it by a sort of virtue inherent in the nature of things — by the blind and unconscious concatenation of cause and effect."
>
> — Chamber's *Encyclopaedia*
> Sub. Buddhism

Let me conclude with a *shloka:*

नमस्यामो देवान् ननु हतविधस्तेऽपि वशगाः ।
विधिर्वन्द्यः सोऽपि प्रतिनियतकर्मैकफ़लदः ।।

कलं कर्मायत्तं किममरगणैः किं ज विधिना ।
नमस्तत्कर्मभ्या विचिरपि न येभ्यः प्रभवति ॥
— भर्तुहरि, नीतिशतके ।

To the gods or angels we our homage pay;
But to sorry Fate subject e'en them we find;
Then is our worship due to Fate ?
Sure *he* yields but the fruit our actions rate.
And the fruit on actions of our own depends;
—Hence small account of gods or angels or of Fate.
Then hail, our actions small or great!
Over whom not even Fate prevails!

—My own attempt at a free rendering of the above from Bhartrihari — Nitishataka.

Karwar (N. Kanara) I am & c.,
10th March, 1925 S. D. Nadakarni

I cannot refuse space to Mr. Nadkarni's clever letter. I must, however, adhere to my opinion that neither Jainism nor Buddhism are Atheistic. I present Mr. Nadkarni with these definitions of God : The sum total of Karma is God. That which impels man to do the right is God. The sum total of all that lives is God. That which makes man the mere plaything of fate is God. That which sustained Bradlaugh throughout all his trials was God. He is the Denial of the atheist.

Young India, 30-4-'25, p. 155

20
WHAT IS GOD ?

(The following paragraphs are reproduced from a speech of Gandhiji before a gathering of Conscientious Objectors in Villeneuve in Swizerland which appeared in *Letter from Europe* by M. D.)

The Cinscientious Objections' meeting was in a church where Ceresole* and his friends had prepared a wonderful welcome for Gandhiji. All sang in chorus standing hand in hand, the Swiss fellowship song, and the President of the meeting read a touching address: 'We are afraid of the unknown, prison, responsibility, death. You know no fear. We have got the Sermon on the Mount on our lips. You have got it in your heart and are living it. Welcome in our midst and teach us to live more dedicated lives.' And so on and so forth. The questions asked touched subjects like God and truth and non-resistance. Mr. Privat who translated at one stage, found some of the answers beyond him and Prof. Bovet, the Swish philosopher, took his place. In this letter I shall take up only one question: 'Why do you regard God as Truth?'

"You have asked me why I consider that God is Truth. In my early youth I was taught to repeat what in Hindu scriptures are known as one thousand names of God. But these one thousand names of God were by no means exhaustive. We believe — and I think it is the truth — that God has as many names as there are creatures and, therefore, we also say that God is nameless and since God has many forms we also consider Him formless, and since He speaks to us through many tongues we consider Him to be speechless and so on. And so when I came to study Islam I found that Islam too had many names for God. I would say with those who say God is Love, God is Love. But deep down in me I used to say that though God may be Love, God is Truth, above all. If it is

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*Pierre Ceresole, Swiss engineer and mathematician was the founder of an organization called "International Service Civile" or "International Voluntary Service for Peace".

possible for the human tongue to give the fullest description of God, I have come to the conclusion that for myself, God is Truth. But two years ago I went a step further and said that Truth is God. You will see the fine distinction between the two statements, viz. that God is Truth and Truth is God. And I came to the conclusion after a continuous and relentless search after Truth which began nearly fifty years ago. I then found that the nearest approach to Truth was through love. But I also found that love has many meanings in the English language at least and that human love in the sense of passion could become a degarding thing also. I found too that love in the sense of Ahimsa had a limited number of votaries in the world. But I never found a double meaning in connection with truth and not even atheists had demurred to the necessity or power of truth. But in their passion for discovering truth the atheists have not hesitated to deny the very existence of God — from their own point of view rightly. And it was because of this reasoning that I saw that rather than say that God is Truth I should say that Truth is God. I recall the name of Charles Bradlaugh who delighted to call himself an atheist, but knowing as I do something of him, I would never regard him as an atheist. I would call him a God-fearing man, though I know he would reject the claim. His face would redden if I would say that 'Mr. Bradlaugh, you are a truth-fearing man, and not a God-fearing man.' I would automatically disarm his criticism by saying that Truth is God, as I have disarmed criticisms of many a young man. Add to this the great difficulty that millions have taken the name of God and in His name committed nameless atrocities. Not that scientists very often do not commit cruelties in the name of truth. I know how in the name of truth and science inhuman cruelties are perpetrated on animals when men perform vivisection. There are thus a number of difficulties in the way, no matter how you describe God. But the human mind is a limited thing, and you have to labour under limitations when you think of a being or entity who is beyond the power of man to grasp. And then we have another thing in Hindu philosophy, viz., God alone is and

nothing else exists, and the same truth you find emphasized and exemplified in the Kalma of Islam. There you find it clearly stated — that God alone is and nothing else exists. In fact the Sanskrit word for Truth is a word which literally means that which exists — *Sat.* For these and several other reasons that I can give you I have come to the conclusion that the definition — Truth is God — gives me the greatest satisfication. And when you want to find Truth as God the only inevitable means is Love, i.e. non-violence, and since I believe that ultimately the means and end are convertible terms, I should not hesitate to say that God is Love.

"What then is Truth?

"A difficult question," said Gandhiji, "but I have solved it for myself by saying that it is what the voice within tells you. How, then, you ask different people think of different and contrary truths? Well, seeing that the human mind works through innumerable media and that the evolution of the human mind is not the same for all, it follows that what may be truth for one may be untruth for another, and hence those who have made these experiments have come to the conclusion that there are certain conditions to be observed in making those experiments. Just as for conducting scientific experiments there is an indispensable scientific course of instruction, in the same way strict preliminary discipline is necessary to qualify a person to make experiments in the spiritual realm. Everyone should, therefore, realize his limitations before he speaks of his inner voice. Therefore we have the belief based upon experience, that those who would make individual search after truth as God, must go through several vows, as for instance the vow of truth, the vow of Brahmacharya (purity) for you cannot possibly divide your love for Truth and God with anything else — the vow of non-violence, of poverty and non-possession. Unless you impose on yourselves the five vows you may not embark on the experiment at all. There are several other conditions prescribed, but I must not take you through all of them. Suffice it to say that those who have made these experiments know that it is not proper for everyone to claim to

hear the voice of conscience and it is because we have at the present moment everybody claiming the right of conscience without going through any discipline whatsoever and there is so much untruth being delivered to a bewildered world, all that I can in true humility present to you is that truth is not to be found by anybody who has not an abundant sense of humility. If you would swim on the bosom of the ocean of Truth you must reduce yourself to a zero. Further than this I cannot go along this fascinating path.''

Young India, 31-12-'31, p. 424 at p. 427

21
TRUTH IS GOD
I

(The following letter by Gandhiji to the children in the Ashram is included as letter No. XXXII dated 21-3-1932 in the publication *Selected Letters I.* The letters were chosen and translated from Gujarati into English by Valji Govindji Desai.)

Do you remember my definition of God? Instead of saying that God is Truth, I say that Truth is God. This was not always clear to me. I realized it only four years ago, but my conduct has been unconsciously based on that realization. I have known God only as Truth. There was a time when I had doubt about the existence of God, but I never doubted the existence of Truth. This Truth is not something material but pure intelligence. It rules over the universe; therefore it is Ishvara (the Lord). ... This is for one almost a matter of experience. I say almost, because I have not seen Truth face to face. I have had only glimpses of it. But my faith is indomitable.

II

(From letter No. XXXVIII in *Selected Letters I)*

In the phrase 'Seeing God face to face' 'face to face' is not to be taken literally. It is a matter of decided feeling. God is formless. He can therefore only be seen by spiritual sight.

22

THAT INDEFINABLE SOMETHING

(Originally appeared under the title "God and Congress")

A friend writes :

"There is one matter on which I have been longing to approaching you for an explanation. It is about the term 'God'. As a national worker I would not have anything to say against such a passage as occurring in a recent number of *Young India* : 'I present it (Ramanama) to the reader whose vision is not blurred and whose faith is not damped by over much learning. Learning takes us through many stages in life, but it fails us utterly in the hour of danger and temptation. Then faith alone saves.' *(Young India,* 22-1-'25, p. 27). For it is a confession of your individual faith; and I know also that you have not failed on occasions to put in a word of praise about conscientious atheists where it was deserved. As witness the following sentences in your *Nitidharma*: 'We come across many wicked men, priding themselves on their religiosity, while doing the most immoral deeds. On the other hand, there are also men like the late Mr. Bradlaugh who, while being extermely virtuous and moral, take pride in calling themselves atheists.' As for the faith in Ramanama which 'alone saves us in the hour of danger and temptation', I may mention the martyrdom of the rationalist Francisco Ferrer in 1909 at Barcelona in Spain at the hands of men who believed in Jesus' name, their Ramanama. I shall not dwell on the Holy War, the burnings and mutilations of heretics, and the torture and slaughter of animal and sometimes of men in sacrifice — all of which have been carried out 'for the greater glory of God and in His name'. This is by the bye.

"As a national worker, however, I feel I must draw your attention to the objection which Mr. — raised (on behalf of a rationalist friend of his) to your saying that only 'God-fearing' men can become true N. C. O.s, and remind you of the assurance you then gave to all to the effect that the programme of national work does not require a man to declare his religious

> faith. (Vide *Young India,* May 4, 1921, pp. 138-39.) That objection applies with greater force now than it did at that time, because 'God' has now a place on pledges and vows such as that administered to Congress Volunteers, which begins with 'With God as witness, I....' Now you must be knowing that the Buddhists (like the Burmese — now an 'Indian' people and your friend Prof. Dharmanand Kosambi) and the Jains, as well as many Indians who do not belong to these ancient recognized sects are agnostic in faith. Is it possible to these, if they wish, to enrol as Congress Volunteers conscientiously and with full understanding of a pledge which begins in the name of any Entity they ignore? If not, is it proper to exclude from Congress service any such merely because of their religious faith? May I suggest that a conscience clause be added to accommodate all such cases allowing of solemn affirmation in place of the oath in the name of God (to which even some believers in a personal God object, as the Quakers), or else a substitution of 'Conscience' in place of 'God' by all conscientious objectors to the use of the latter, or — best of all — that a solemn affirmation without reference to God and with or without 'Conscience' be required of *all* comers without distinction? I approach you as you are the author of that pledge and now the President of the Congress. I did so once before, but am afraid not in time for you to be able to attend to it before your historic arrest at Sabarmati in 1922."

So far as the conscientious objection is concerned, the mention of God may be removed if required from the Congress pledge of which I am proud to think I was the author. Had such an objection been raised at the time, I would have yielded at once. I was unprepared for the objection in a place like India. Though there is officially the Charvak School, I do not know that it has any votaries. I deny that Buddhists and Jains are atheists or agnostics. The latter they cannot be. Those who believe in the soul as apart from and capable of life independent of and after the dissolution of the body cannot be called atheists. We may all have different definitions for 'God'. If we could all give our own definitions of God, there would be

as many definitions as there are men and women. But behind all that variety of definitions there would also be a certain sameness which would be unmistakable. For the root is one. God is that indefinable something which we all feel but which we do not know. Charles Bradlaugh described himself as an atheist no doubt, but many a Christian declined to regard him as such. He recognized in Bradlaugh a greater kinship with himself than many a lip Christian. I had the privilege of attending the funeral of that good friend of India. I noticed several clergymen at the function. There were certainly several Mussalmans and many Hindus in the procession. They all believed in God. Bradlaugh's denial of God was a denial of Him as He was known to Bradlaugh to have been described. His was an eloquent and indignant protest against the then current theology and the terrible contract between precept and practice. To me God is Truth and Love; God is ethics and morality; God is fearlessness. God is the source of Light and Life and yet He is above and beyond all these. God is conscience. He is even the atheism of the atheist. For in His boundless love God permits the atheist to live. He is the searcher of hearts. He transcends speech and reason. He knows us and our hearts better than we do ourselves. He does not take us at our word for He knows that we offen do not mean it, some knowingly and others unkonwingly. He is a personal God to those who need His personal presence. He is embodied to those who need his touch. He is the purest essence. He simply is to those who have faith. He is all things to all men. He is in us and yet above and beyond us. One may banish the word 'God' from the Congress but one has no power to banish the Thing Itself. What is a solemn affirmation if it is not the same thing as in the name of God. And surely conscience is but a poor and laborious paraphrase of the simple combination of three letters called God. He cannot cease to be because hideous immoralities or inhumman brutalities are committed in His name. He is long suffering. He is patient but He is also terrible. He is the most exacting personage in the world and the world to come. He metes out the same measure to us that we mete

out to our neighbours — men and brutes. With Him ignorance is no excuse. And withal He is every forgiving for He always gives us the chance to repent. He is the greatest democrat the world knows, for He leaves us 'unfettered' to make our own choice between evil and good. He is the greatest tyrant ever known, for He often dashes the cup from our lips and under cover of free will leaves us a margin so wholly inadequate as to provide only mirth for Himself at our expense. Therefore it is that Hinduism calls it all His sport — *Lila,* or calls it all an illusion — *Maya.* We are *not*, He alone *is*. And if we will be, we must eternally sing His praise and do His will. Let us dance to the tune of His *bansi* — lute, and all would be well.

Young India, 5-3-'25, p. 80

23

WHO AND WHERE IS GOD ?

(From the original in Gujarati)

I have defined *brahmacharya* as that correct way of life which leads to Brahma, i.e. God, Straightaway the question arises : "What or who is God?" If man knew the answer, it would enable him to find the path that leads to Him.

God is not a person. To affirm that He descends to earth every now and again in the form of a human being is a partial truth which merely signifies that such a person lives near to God. Inasmuch as God is omnipresent, He dwells within every human being and all may, therefore, be said to be incarnations of Him. But this leads us nowhere, Rama. Krishna, etc. are called incarnations of God because we attribute divine qualities to them. In truth they are creations of man's imagination. Whether they actually lived or not does not affect the picture of them in men's minds. The Rama and Krishna of history often present difficulties which have to be overcome by all manner of arguments.

The truth is that God is the force. He is the essence of life. He is pure and undefiled consciousness. He is eternal. And yet, strangely enough, all are not able to derive either

benefit from or shelter in the all-pervading living presence.

Electricity is a powerful force. Not all can benefit from it. It can only be produced by following certain laws. It is lifeless force. Man can utilize it if he labours hard enough to acquire the knowledge of its laws.

The living force which we call God can similarly be found if we know and follow His law leading to the discovery of Him in us. But it is self-evident that to find out God's law requires far harder labour. The law may, in one word, be termed *brahmcharaya.* The straight way to cultivate *brahmcharya* is Ramanama. I can say this from experience. Devotees and sages like Tulasidas have shown us this royal path. No one need give undue importance to my own experience. Perhaps I am right in saying that the potency of Ramanama was brought vividly home to me in Uruli-Kanchan. It was there that I assured that the surest remedy for all our ills was Ramanama. He who can make full use of it can show powerful results with very little outside effort.

Following this line of thought I can say with conviction that the orthodox aids to *brahmcharya* pale into insignificance before Ramanama, when this name is enthroned in the heart. Then and then only do we realize its transcendent beauty and power. In the vigilant search for this matchless beauty and unfailing weapon we find that it is hard to differentiate between ends and means. Thus, the elevan rules of conduct are the means to enable us to reach God. Of the eleven rules Truth is the means and God called Rama is the end. Is it not equally true that Ramanama is the means and Truth is the end?

But let me revert to the original point. The accepted meaning of *brahmcharya* is the attainment by man of complete control over the sex organ. The golden means to attain that end is Ramanama. For proving the efficacy of Ramanama there are undoubted rules. I dwelt on them up to a point some months ago, but it will be worthwhile to recount them.

Harijan, 22-6-'47, p. 200

24

IS GOD A PERSON OR FORCE ?

(From *Harijanbandhu*)

A friend from Baroda writes in English :

> "You ask us to pray to God to give light to the whites in South Africa and strength and courage to the Indians there to remain steadfast to the end. A prayer of this nature can only be addressed to a person. If God is an all-pervading and all-powerful force, what is the point of praying to Him? He goes on with his work whatever happens."

I have written on this topic before. But as it is a question that crops up again and again in different languages, further elucidation is likely to help someone or the other. In my opinion, Rama, Rahaman, Ahurmazd, God or Krishna are all attempts on the part of man to name that invincible force which is the greatest of all forces. It is inherent in man, imperfect he though be, ceaselessly to strive after perfection. In the attempt he falls into reverie. And, just as a child tries to stand, falls down again and again and ultimately learns how to walk, even so man, with all his intelligence is a mere infant as compared to the infinite and ageless God. This may appear to be an exaggeration but is not. Man can only describe God in his own poor language. The power we call God defies description. Nor does that power stand in need of any human effort to describe Him. It is man who requires the means whereby he can decribe that Power which is vaster than the ocean. If this premise is accepted, there is no need to ask why we pray. Man can only conceive God within the limitations of his own mind. If God is vast and boundless as the ocean, how can a tiny drop like man imagine what He is? He can only experience what the ocean is like, if be falls into and is merged in it. This realization is beyond description. In Madame Blavatsky's language man, in praying, worships his own glorified self. He can truly pray, who has the conviction that God is within him. He who has not, need not pray. God will not be offended, but I can say from experience that he who

does not pray is certainly a loser. What matters then whether one man worships God as Person and another as Force? Both do right according to their lights. None knows and perhaps never will know what is the absolutely proper way to pray. The ideal must always remain the ideal. One need only remember that God is the Force among all the forces. All other forces are material. But God is the vital force or spirit which is all-pervading, all-embracing and therefore beyond human ken.

Harijan, 18-8-'46, p. 267

25

THE MYSTERY OF MYSTERIES

(From "Weekly Letter No. 20" by Pyarelal)

At Saharsa,* where Gandhiji halted for his Monday silence a crowd of fifty to sixty thousand people literally laid siege to the bungalow, where Gandhiji was staying, from 8 o'clock in the morning. The whole day they sat round the outside of the compound fence, without food or water, in the midst of chocking heat and dust. Towards the evening, their number swelled to over a lakh. Gandhiji addressed them in an open air meeting. The speech turned on the theme, "Is the God who sent the earthquake a heartless and revengeful deity?" "No", replied Gandhiji, "He is neither. Only His ways are not our ways." He elaborated the argument further in a letter to a friend, which he wrote about this time, "When we know that God Himself is the mystery of mysteries, why should anything that He does perplex us? If he acted as we would have Him do, we would not be His creatures and He our creator. The impenetrable darkness that surrounds us is not a curse but a blessing. He has given us powers to see only the step in front of us and it should be enough if Heavenly light reveals that step to us. We can then sing with Newman, 'One step enough for me.' And we may be sure from pur past experience that the next step will always be in view. In other words, the

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*A place in the State of Bihar.

impenetrable darkness is nothing so impenetrable as we may imagine. But it seems impenetrable when, in our impatience, we want to look beyond that one step. And since God is love, we can say definitely that even the physical catastrophes that He sends now and then must be a blessing in disguise. But they can be so only to those who regard them as a warning for introspection and self-purification."

Harijan, 20-4-'34, p. 73 at p. 78

26
UNDERSTANDING THE MYSTRY OF GOD

(From "Two Requests")

No man has ever been able to describe God fully. . . . God alone is omniscient. Man in the flesh is essentially imperfect. He may be described as being made in the image of God but he is far from being God. God is invisible, beyond the reach of the human eye. All that we can do, therefore, is to try to understand the words and actions of those whom we regard as men of God. Let them soak into our being and let us endeavour to translate them into action but only so far as they appeal to the heart.

Harijan, 3-3-'46 p. 28 at p. 29

27

THE SEEMING PARADOX OF GOD

(Appeared originally under the heading "Meaning of God")

A correspondent writes :

> "I am reading your *Gitabodh* these days and trying to understand it. I am puzzled by what Lord Krishna says in the 10th discourse. 'In dicer's play I am the conquering double eight. Nothing, either good or evil, can take place in this world without my will.' Does God then permit evil? If so, how can He punish the evil-doer? Has God created the world for this purpose? Is it impossible then for mankind to live in peace?"

To say that God permits evil in this world may not be pleasing to the ear. But if He is held responsible for the good, it follows that He has to be responsible for the evil too. Did not God permit Ravana to exhibit unparalleled strength? Perhaps, the root cause of the perplexity arises from a lack of the real understanding of what God is. God is not a person. He transcends description. He is the Law-maker, the Law and the Executor. No human being can well arrogate these powers to himself. If he did, he would be looked upon as an unadulterated dictator. They become only Him whom we worship as God. This is the reality, a clear understanding of which will answer the question raised by the correspondent.

The question whether it is impossible for mankind ever to be at peace with one another does not arise from the verse quoted. The world will live in peace only when the individuals composing it make up their minds to do so. No one can deny the possibility nor say when that will come to pass. Such questions are idle waste of time. To a good man, the whole world is good. By following this golden rule the correspondent can live in peace under all circumstances, believing that what is possible for him to be is also possible for others. To believe the contrary connotes pride and arrogance.

Harijan, 24-2-'46, p. 24

28

IS GOD A CREATION OF MAN'S IMAGINATION ?

(From "Question Box")

Q.: God is a creation of man's imagination. It is not God who has created man but man who has created God. Is this not true?

A.: I have taken this from a corrspondent's letter. There is a semblance of truth in what he say. The writer has, however unwittingly, created the illusion by a play upon the two words 'creation" and "God".

God Himself is both the Law and the Law-giver. The question of anyone creating Him, therefore, does not arise, least of all by an insignificant creature such as man. Man can build a dam, but he cannot create a river. He can manufacture a chair, but it is beyond him to make the wood. He can, however, picture God in his mind in many ways. But how can man who is unable to create even a river or wood create God? That God has created man is, therefore, the pure truth. The contrary is an illusion. However, anyone may, if he likes, say that God is neither the doer nor the cause. Either is predicable of Him.

Harijan, 14-4-'46. p. 80

29

THAT WHICH GIVES THE GREATEST SOLACE

(From a letter written by Gandhiji to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru)

My Dear Jawaharlal,

I am in Tithal, a place somwhat like Juhu, resting for four days to fit myself for the Bengal ordeal. I am trying here to overtake my correspondence in which I find your letter referring to the article "God and Congress". I sympathize with you in your difficulties. True religion being the greatest thing in life and in the world, it has been exploited the most. And those who have seen the exploiters and the exploitation and missed the reality naturally get disgusted with the thing itself. But religion is after all a matter for each individual and then too a matter of the heart, call it then by whatever name you like, that which gives the greatest solace in the midst of the severest fire

is God. Any way you are on the right track. I do not mind reason being the sole test even though it often bewilders one and lands one in errors that border on superstition. . . .

Yours,

April 25, 1925 Bapu

A Bunch of Letters by Jawaharlal Nehru, p. 42

30
LET THE IGNORANT DISPUTE HIS EXISTENCE

(A question and the answers thereto from an article entitled "Three Vital Questions" are reproduced below.)

Q.: You have often said that God is an Impersonal, Absolute Being, free from passions or attributes, which means that He is not the author of the Universe nor does He sit in judgment over man's virtue and vice. And you talk of the will of God every now and then. How can a God without any attribute have a will and how can you conform your will to His? Your *Atman* is free to do whatever he likes. If he does not succeed in doing it, it is the result of his past doings, God has nothing to do with it. And yet *you* cannot be talking of the will of God to beguile the common folk, for you are a Satyagrahi. Why then this fatalism?

A.: I talk of God exactly as I believe Him to be. Why should I beguile people into error and work my own perdition? I seek no reward from them. I believe God to be creative as well as non-creative. This too is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of manyness of reality. From the platform of the Jains I prove the non-creative aspect of God and from that of Ramanuja the creative aspect. As a matter of fact we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the Vedas describe Brahman as 'not this', 'not this'. But if He or It is not this, He or It is. If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not, we are nowhere. And that is why all of us with one voice call *one* God differently as

Paramatma, Ishwara, Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Allah, Khuda, Dada Hormuzda, Jehova, God and an infinite variety of names. He is *one* and yet many. He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say: "God is, was and ever shall be."

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful, and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says: 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept my sway.' Of such a God let the ignorant dispute the existence. I am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His Glory.

Young India, 21-1-'21, p. 80

31
GOD OR NO GOD

During my visit to the South I met Harijans and others who pretended not to believe in God. At one place where a conference of Harijans was being held, the Chairman delivered a harangue on atheism under the very shadow of a temple which Harijans had built for themselves with their own money. But out of the bitterness of his heart for the treatment meted out to fellow Harijans, he had begun to doubt the very existence of a Benevolent Power that had allowed such cruetly to flourish. There was, perhaps, some excuse for this disbelief.

But here is specimen of disbelief of another type from another source :

> "Don't you think that a preconceived idea of a God, Truth or Reality might colour the whole trend of our search and hence be a great impediment and may defeat the very purpose of our life? For example, you take certain moral truths as fundamental. But we are in search and, as long as we have not found the reality, how can we boast or assert that a certain rule of morality is the truth or it alone is going to help us in our search?"

No search is possible without some workable assumptions. If we grant nothing, we find nothing. Ever since its commencement, the world, the wise and the foolish included, has proceeded upon the assumption that if we are, God is and that, if God is not, we are not. And since belief in God is co-existent with the humankind, existence of God is treated as a fact more definite than the fact that the Sun is. This living faith has solved the largest number of puzzles of life. It has alleviated our misery. It sustains us in life, it is our one solace in death. The very search for Truth becomes interesting, worth while, because of this belief. But search for Truth is search for God. Truth is God. God is, becaue Truth is. We embark upon the search beacuse we believe that there is Truth and that It can be found by diligent search and meticulous observance of the well-known and well-tried rules of the search. There is no record in history of the failure of such search. Even the atheists who have pretended to disbelieve in God have believed in Truth. The trick they have performed is that of giving God another, not a new, name. His names are legion. Truth is the crown of them all.

What is true of God is true, though in a less degree, of the 'assumption of the truth of some fundamental moralities'. As a matter of fact, they are implied in the belief in God or Truth. Departure from these has landed the truants in endless misery. Difficulty of practice should not be confused with disbelief. A Himalayan expedition has its prescribed conditions of success. Difficulty of fulfilling the conditions does not make the expedition impossible. It only adds interest and zest to the search. Well, this expedition in search of God or Truth is infinitely more than numberless Himalayan

expeditions and, therefore, much more interesting. If we have no zest for it, it is because of the weakness of our faith. What we see with our physical eyes is more real to us than the only Reality. We know that appearances are deceptive. And yet we treat trivialities as realities. To see the trivialities as such is half the battle won. It constitutes more than half the search after Truth or God. Unless we discharge ourselves from trivialities, we have not even the leisure for the great search, or is to be reserved for our leisure hours?

Harijan, 21-9-'34, p. 252

32

HOW TO CONVERT ATHEISTS

(From "Question Box", translated from Hindustani)

Q.: How can one convert atheists to belief in God and religion?

A.: There is only one way. The true servant of God can convert the atheist by means of his own purity and good conduct. It can never be done by argument. Innumerable books have been written to prove the existence of God, and if argument could have prevailed, there would not be a single atheist in the world today. But the opposite is the case. In spite of all the literature on the subject, atheism is on the increase. Often, however, the man who calls himself an atheist is not one in reality; and the converse also is equally true. Aheists sometimes say, "If you are believers, then we are unbelievers." And they have a right to say so, for self-styled believers are often not so in reality. Many worship God because it is the fashion to do so or in order to deceive the world. Hou can such persons have any influence on atheists? Therefore let the believer realize and have the faith that, if he is true to God, his neighbours will instinctively not be atheists. Do not let him be troubled about the whole world. Let us remember that atheists exist by the sufferance of God. How truly has it been said that those who worship God in name only are not believers but those who do His will!

Harijan, 1-9-'40, p. 268 at p. 269

33
GOD AND GODS

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

A Roman Catholic Father who saw Gandhiji suggested, "If Hinduism became mono-theistic, Christianity and Hinduism can serve India in co-operation."

"I would love to see the co-operation happen," said Gandhiji, "but it cannot if the present-day Christian missions persist in holding up Hinduism to ridicule and saying that no one can go to Heaven unless he renounces and denounces Hinduism. But I can conceive a good Christian, silently working away, and shedding the sweet aroma of his life on Hindu communities, like the rose which does not need any speech to spread its fragrance but spreads it because it must. Even so a truly spiritual life. Then surely there would be peace on earth and godwill among men. But not so long as there is militant or 'muscular' Christianity. This is not to be found in the Bible, but you find it in Germany and other countries."

"But if Indians begin to believe in one God and give up idolatry, don't you think the whole difficulty will be solved?"

"Will the Christians be satisfied with it? Are they all united?"

"Of course all the Christian sects are not united," said the Catholic Father.

"Then you are asking only a theoretical question. And may I ask you is there any amalgamation between Islam and Christianity, though both are said to believe in one God? If these two have not amalgamated there is less hope of amalgamation of Christians and Hindus along the lines you suggest. I have my own solution, but in the first instance I dispute the description that Hindus believe in many gods and are idolaters. They do say there are many gods, but they also declare unmistakably that there is ONE GOD, GOD of gods. It is, therefore, not proper to suggest that Hindus believe in many gods. They certainly believe in many worlds. Just as there is a world inhabited by men, and another by beasts so also is there one inhabited by superior beings called gods, whom we do not

see but who nevertheless exist. The whole mischief is created by the English rendering of the word देव or देवता *(deva* or *devata)* for which you have found a better term than 'god'. But God is Ishwara, Devadhideva, God of gods. So you see it is the word 'god' used to describe different divine beings that has given rise to such confusion. I believe that I am a thorough Hindu but I never believe in many gods. Never even in my childhood did I hold that belief, and no one ever taught me to do so."

Harijan, 13-3-'37, p. 37 at p. 39

34
THE LAW OF GOD

(From "Question Box")

Q.: In *Harijanbandhu* of 14-4-1946, you have said, "God is the Law and Law-giver." I do not understand it. Laws are made by man and they keep on changing with time. For instance, Draupadi had five husbands and yet she was considered a *sati.* A woman who does that today will be considered immoral.

A.: Law here means the Law of God. Man interprets that Law according to his understanding. For instance, the rotation of earth is a law of nature. We are convinced of its correctness today. Yet before Galileo, astrononers believed differently. As for Draupadi, the Mahabharata in my opinion is an allegory and not history. Draupadi means the soul wedded to the five senses.

Harijan, 4-8-'46, p. 249

35
THE DEBT TO GOD

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal being a few cullings from discourses of Gandhiji at prayer meetings at Panchagani.)

"In the song that has been sung, the poet says that God is hidden and yet present everywhere," remarked Gandhiji. "That is true. He knows our innermost thoughts better than we ourselves can do. One who depends on God will never be afraid of anybody, not even of the most despotic government on earth or its officers. For he will have as his protector the King of knigs from whose eye nothing is hid."

In another discourse of his he said: "The verse from the *gatha* sung today says: 'Let me remember Thee by making my heart pure by righteous thought, by performing good and wise deeds and by right speech.' Unless all these conditions are fulfilled, one cannot expect to come near God."

"Then the poet says: 'We bow to Thee and thank Thee for all that Thou hast done for us. We will always remain Thy debtors.' What is this debt towards God and how can one repay it? The answer is, by discharging one's duty completely. And since no mortal can completely discharge his duty in life, he must for ever remain a debtor to God."

Harijan, 28-7-'46, p. 243

36
THE GOD I WORSHIP

(From "A Good Ending")

I claim to know my millons. All the 24 hours of the day I am with them. They are my first care and last, because I recognize no God except the God that is to be found in the hearts of the dumb millions. They do not recognize His presence; I do. And I worship the God that is Truth or Truth which is God through the service of these millions.

Harijan, 11-3-'39, p. 44

37
MY REFUGE

(On 9th October 1924, the twentieth day of his fast for restoring amity between Hindus and Muslims, Gandhiji wrote as under :)

Today is the twentieth day of my penance and prayer. Presently from the world of peace I shall enter the world of strife. The more I think of it the more helpless I feel. So many look to me to finish the work begun by the Unity Conference. So many expect me to bring together the political parties. I know that I can do noithing. God can do everything. O God, make me Thy fit instrument and use me as Thou wilt.

Man is nothing. Napoleon planned much and found himself a prisoner in St. Helena. The mighty Kaiser aimed at the crown of Europe and is reduced to the status of a private gentleman. God has so willed it. Let us contemplate such examples and be humble.

During these days of grace, privilege and peace, I have hummed to myself a hymn we often sing at the Satyagrahashram. It is so good that I cannot resist the pleasure of sharing a free rendering of it with the reader. The words of the hymn better express my state than anything else I can write.

Here they are:

My honour, O God! is in Thy keeping;
Thou art ever my Refuge,
For Thou art Protector of the weak.
It is Thy promise to listen to the wail of sinners;
I am sinner of old, help me
Thou to cross this ocean of darkness.
It is Thine to remove the sin
And the misery of mankind.
Be gracious to Tulasidas
And make him Thy devotee.*

Young India, 9-10-’24, p. 329

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*The original Hindi text of the above hymn of Tulasidas is as follows :

रघुवर ! तुमको मेरी लाज ।
सदा सदा मैं सरन तिहारी, तुम बड़े गरीबनिवाज ।।

38
GOD ALONE IS IMPERISHABLE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Accidental delay of a few moments at the prayer meeting provided Gandhiji with another theme for his after-prayer discourse on Thursday last. An important visitor had detained him beyond the stipulated time, so that when he reached the prayer-grounds the prayer had already commenced. Apologizing for the delay in his address at the end of the prayer, he told the audience how pleased he was that Shri Kanu Gandhi had started the prayer without waiting for him. "It should be the general rule that prayers must not be delayed for anybody on earth. God's time never stops. From the very beginning the wheel of His time has gone ceaselessly on. As a matter of fact there is no beginning for Him or His time.

"God is not a person. No one can describe Him as no one has seen Him. He is the Law and the Law-giver combined into one. The author of the Vedas, after the profoundest search has described Him as *Neti, Neti* (not this, not this). He moves all and yet no one can move Him. Not a blade of grass moves without His will. For Him there is no beginning and no end.

"Everything that has a beginning must end. The sun, the moon and the earth must all perish one day even though it might be after an incalculable number of years. God alone is immortal, imperishable. How can man find words to describe Him? How can anyone afford to miss the time of offering prayers to Him whose watch never stops?"

Harijan, 16-6-'46, p. 182 at p. 183

पतित-अुधारन बिरूद तिहारो स्त्रबनन सुनी अवाज ॥
हौ तो पतित पुरातन कहिये, पार अुतारो जहाज ॥
अध-खंडन, दु:ख-भंजन जनके यही तिहारो काज ॥
तुलसीदास पर किरपा करिये भक्ति-दान देहु आज ॥

39

WHERE IS THE LIVING GOD ?

The following is taken from a letter from Bengal :

"I had the privilege to go through your article on birth-control with the heading: 'A Youth's Difficulty'.

"With the original theme of your article, I am in full agreement. But, in that article, you have expressed in a line your sentiment on God. You have said that it is the fashion nowadays for young men to discard the idea of God and they have no living faith in a living God.*

"But, may I ask what proof (which must be positive and undisputed) can you put forth regarding the existence of a God? Hindu philosophers or ancient Rishis, it seems to me, in their attempt to describe the *Swarupa* or reality of Ishwara have at last come to the conclusion that He is indescribable and veiled in *Maya* and so on. In short, they have enveloped God in an impenetrable mist of obscurity and have further complicated, instead of simplifying, the complicated question of God. I do not dare deny that a true Mahatma like you or Sri Aurobindo, or the Buddha and Sankaracharyas of the past may well conceive and realize the existence of such a God, who is far beyond the reach of ordinary human intellect.

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* The passage referred to herein is as under:

"It is the fashion nowadays to dismiss God from life altogether and insist on the possibility of reaching the highest kind of life without the necessity of living faith in God. I must confess my inability to drive the truth of the law (of continence) home to those who have no faith in and no need for a Power infinitely higher than themselves. My own experience has led me to the knowledge that fullest life is impossible without an immovable belief in a living Law in obdience to which the whole Universe moves. A man without that faith is like a drop thrown out of the ocean bound to perish. Every drop in the ocean shares its majesty and has the honour of giving us the ozone of life."

(From "A Youth's Difficulty")

Harijan, 25-4-'36, p. 84

> "But, what have we (the general mass), whose coarse intellect can never penetrate into the unfathomable deep, to do with such a God if we do not feel His presence in our midst? If he is the Creator and Father of us all, why do we not feel His presence or existence in every beat of our hearts? If He cannot make His presence felt, He is no God to me. Further, I have the question — If He is the Father of this universe, does He feel the sorrows of His children? If He feels so then why did He work havoc and inflict so much misery on His children by the devastating 'quakes of Bihar and Quetta? Why did He humiliate an innocent nation — the Abyssinians? Are the Abyssinians not His sons? Is He not Almighty? Then why could He not prevent these calamities? You carried on a non-violent truthful campaign for the independence of my poor mother India and you implored the help of God. But, I think, that help has been denied to you and the strong force of materialism, which never depends on the help of God, got the better of you and you were humiliated and you have sunk into the background by forced retirement. If there was a God, He would certainly have helped you, for your cause was indeed a deserving one! I need not multiply such instances.
>
> "So, it is not at all surprising that young men of the present day do not believe in a God, because they do not want to make a *supposition* of God — they want a *real living* God. You have mentioned in your article of a living faith in a living God. I shall feel highly gratified and I think you will be rendering a great benefit to the young world, if you put forth some positive, undeniable proofs of the existence of God. I have the confidence that you will not more mystify the already mystified problem and will throw some definite light on the matter."

I very much fear that what I am about to write will not remove the mist to which the correspondent alludes.

The writer supposes that I might have realised the existence of a living God. I can lay no such claim. But I do have a living faith in a living God even as I have a living faith in many things that scientists tell me. It may be retorted that what the scientists say can be verified if one followed the

prescription given for realizing the facts which are taken for granted. Precisely in that manner speak the Rishis and the Prophets. They say anybody following the path they have trodden can realise God. The fact is we do not want to follow the path leading to realization and we won't take the testimony of eye-witnesses about the one thing that really matters. Not all the achievements of physical sciences put together can compare with that which gives us a living faith in God. Those who do not want to believe in the existence of God do not believe in the existence of anything apart from the body. Such a belief is held to be unnecessary for the progress of humanity. For such persons the weightiest argument in proof of the existence of soul or God is of no avail. You cannot make a person who has stuffed his ears, listen to, much less appreciate, the finest music. Even so can you not convince those about existence of a living God who do not want the conviction.

Fortunately the vast majority of people do have a living faith in a living God. They cannot, will not, argue about it. For them, "It is". Are all the scriptures of the world old women's tales of superstition? Is the testimony of the Rishis, the Prophets to be rejected? Is the testimony of the Chaitanya, Ramakrishna Paramhamsa, Tukaram, Dnyandeva, Ramdas, Nanak, Kabir, Tulasidas of no value? What about Ramamohan Roy, Devendranath Tagore, Vivekanand — all modern men as well educated as the tallest among the living ones? I omit the living witnesses whose evidence would be considered unimpeachable. This belief in God has to be based on faith which transcends reason. Indeed even the so-called realization has at bottom an element of faith without which it cannot be sustained. In the very nature of things it must be so. Who can transgress the limitations of his being? I hold that complete realization is impossible in this embodied life. Nor is it necessary. A living immovable faith is all that is required for reaching the full spiritual height attainable by human beings. God is not outside this earthly case of ours. Therefore exterior proof is not of much avail, if any at all. We must ever fail to perceive Him through the senses, because He is beyond them.

We can feel Him, if we will but withdraw ourselves from the senses. The divine music is incessantly going on within ourselves, but the loud senses drown the delicate music which is unlike and infinitely superior to anything we can perceive or hear with our senses.

The writer wants to know why, if God is a God of mercy and justice, He allows all the miseries and sorrows we see around us. I can give no satisfactory explanation. He imputes to me a sense of defeat and humiliation. I have no such sense of defeat, humiliation or despair. My retirement, such as it is, has nothing to do with any defeat. It is no more and no less than a course of self-purification and self-preparation. I state this to show that things are often not what they seem. It may be that what we mistake as sorrows, injustices and the like are not such in truth. If we could solve all the mysteries of the universe, we would be co-equals with God. Every drop of the ocean shares its glory but is not the ocean. Realizing our littleness during this tiny span of life, we close every morning prayer with the recitation of a verse which means: "Misery so-called is no misery nor riches so-called riches. Forgetting (or denying) God is the true misery, remembering (or faith in) God is true riches."

Harijan, 13-6-'36, p. 140

40

GOD IS NOT, WHERE HARIJANS ARE EXCLUDED

(From "Conundrums" — translated from *Harijanbandhu* dated 24-1-1937 by Pyarelal)

Q.: Your statement that God does not reside in temples when Harijans are not admitted seems to me to be a one-sided and therefore misleading statement. In my opinion it is as untrue to say that God is not in temples where Harijans are not admitted as that God is to be found only in temples and not outside. It challenges as it were the omnipresence of God. He is everywhere, there is no place where He is not.

Gandhiji's answer:

True, the statement that God does not dwell in temples from which Harijans are excluded is one-sided and therefore

true only in a certain and limited sense only. But does that not apply to human speech itself? But we have not on that account condemned or discarded the use of human speech. With all its imperfections as a vehicle for the expression of truth, we must rely on it for all practical purposes, or it would spell an end of all human intercourse. Tulasidas has made Rama say in his Ramayana that God dwells only in the hearts of the good and the pure, not of those who are wicked or evil-minded. Now this statement, again, is only partly true. But still more untrue and mischievous in its pragmatic sense would be its reverse, viz. that God dwells in the hearts of the wicked and evil-minded too and actuates them in their evil deeds, though as a strictly scientific statement of truth it would be perhaps nearer the mark. In a strictly scientific sense God is at the bottom of both good and evil. He directs the assassin's dagger no less than the surgeon's knife. But for all that, good and evil are, for human purposes, from each other distinct and incompatible, being symbolical of light and darkness, God and Satan, Ahriman and Ormuzd respectively. My statement, therefore, that where Harijans are excluded there God is not, must stand.

Harijan, 20-2-'37, p.9

41
GOD IS GOOD

God is good not in the same sense as X is good. X is comparatively good. He is more good then evil, but God is wholly good. There is no evil in Him. God made man in his own image. Unfortunately for us man has fashioned Him in his own. This arrogation has landed mankind in a sea of troubles. God is the Supreme Alchemist. In His presence all iron and dross turn into pure gold. Similarly does all evil turn into good.

Again God lives but not as we. His creatures live but to die. But God is life. Therefore, goodness and all it connotes is not an attribute. Goodness is God. Goodness conceived as apart from Him is a lifeless thing and exists only whilst it is a

paying policy. So are all morals. If they are to live in us they must be considered and cultivated in their relation to God. We must try to become good because we want to reach and realize God. All the dry ethics of the world turn to dust because apart from God they are lifeless. Coming from God, they come with life in them. They become part of us and ennoble us.

Conversely, God conceived without Goodness is without life. We give him life in our vain imaginings.

Harijan, 24-8-'47, p. 289

42
LORD OF HUMILITY

[*Bapu* is the title of a small book by Miss F. Marry Barr just published by International Book House Ltd., Bombay - (Price Rs. 2/12/-). It contains conversations and correspondence of the writer with Gandhiji along with relevant narrative. Just fifteen years ago she received from Gandhiji a letter in which was enclosed the following prayer composed by Bapu himself for being delivered to Miss Linforth, an English woman who was then working at a Hyderabad Welfare Centre, and who had asked Miss Barr "to get Gandhi to give her a message". Miss Linforth framed and put it up in her centre. To avoid misunderstanding, let it be added that the poem-like form in which it is printed below is the art of the sub-editor and not of Bapu, who wrote it running like simple prose. - Ed.]

Lord of humility, dwelling in the
little pariah hut,
help us to reach for Thee throughout
that fair land
watered by Ganges, Brahmaputra
and Jamuna.

Give us receptiveness, give us open-heartedness,
give us Thy humility, give us
the ability and willingness
to identify ourselves with the
masses of India.

O God, who does help only when man
feels utterly humble,
grant that we may not be
isolated from the people
we would serve as servants
and friends.

Let us be embodiments of self-sacrifice,
embodiments of godliness,
humility personified, that we
may know the land better
and love it more.

Harijan, 11-9-'49, p. 217

43

MEANING OF 'GOD IS TRUTH'

(From a letter of Gandhiji dated 9-7-1932 to Mr. P. G. Mathew)

In 'God is Truth', *is* certainly does not mean 'equal to' nor does it merely mean, 'is truthful'. Truth is not a mere attribute of God, but He is That. He is nothing if He is not That. Truth in Sanskrit means *Sat. Sat* means Is. Therefore Truth is implied in *Is.* God is, nothing else Is. Therefore the more truthful we are, the nearer we are to God. We *are* only to the extent that we are truthful.

Harijan, 27-3-'49, p. 26

44

GOD IS EVER WITH US

(From "Not Lonely")

A friend wrote to me the other day how lonely he felt in the midst of company. This remark was prompted by my telling him that I distrusted the word of the official world. He did not, and had thought that I might share his trust. Behold his disappointment when he found me wanting. It may be that was not what he meant by his cryptic letter. Anyway that was

my interpretation and I replied that as a man of God he must never feel lonely. For, God was ever with him. Why should he care even if the whole world deserted him? Let him trust in spite of me, as long as the trust came from his heart and not his head.

I feel differently. Mutual trust and mutual love are no trust and no love. The real love is to love them that hate you, to love your neighbour even though you distrust him. If my love is sincere, I must love the Englishman in spite of my distrust. Of what avail is my love, if it be only so long as I trust my friend? Even thieves do that. They become enemies immediately the trust is gone.

Harijan, 3-3-'46, p. 28

45
"SEEING GOD FACE TO FACE"
I

A subscriber to the *Harijan* presents as follows what appears to him to be a conundrum to which I have sent the following reply:

Conundrum

> "The other day you admitted that you had not seen God face to face. In the preface to *My Experiments with Truth* you have stated that you have seen God in the embodiment of Truth from a far distance. The two statements appear to be incompatible. Kindly elucidate for proper understanding."

Reply

There is a big gulf between 'seeing God face to face' and 'seeing Him in the embodiment of Truth from a far distance'. In my opinion the two statements are not only not incompatible but each explains the other. We see the Himalayas from a very great distance and when we are on the top we have seen the Himalayas face to face. Millions can see them from hundreds of miles if they are within the range of that seeing distance, but few having arrived at the top after years of travel see them face to face. This does not seem to need elucidation in the

columns of the *Harijan*. Nethertheless, I send your letter and my reply for publication in the *Harijan* lest there may be some like you who think that there is any inconsistency between the two statements quoted by you.

Harijan, 23-11-'47, p. 432

II

(From "Gandhiji's Speeches")

Before the prayers started, some one passed a note to Gandhiji. In it the writer had asked him whether he had seen God face to face. Answering the question after prayers, Gandhiji said that he had not seen God face to face. If he had, he would have no need to be speaking to them. His thought would be potent enough to render speech and action on his part unnecessary. But he had an undying faith in the existence of God. Millions all over the world shared that faith with him. The most learned could not shake the faith of the illiterate millions. The *bhajan* sung during the prayer described the way to see God face to face. The poet asked the aspirant to shed anger and desire and to be indifferent to praise or blame if he expected to reach the blessed state.

Harijan, 3-8-'47, p. 258 at p. 262

III

(From "Notes" — rendered from the original in Hindustani)

A correspondent writes:

"In your article "Action in Inaction" you say that you have not reached that state. The sentence looks simple enough but I would like you to expand the meaning a little."

There is a stage in life when a man does not need even to proclaim his thoughts much less to show them by outward action. Mere thoughts act. They attain that power. Then it can be said of him that his seeming inaction constitutes his action. I must confess that I am far from that state. All I can say is that my striving is in that direction.

Harijan, 26-10-47, p. 381

46
FINDING GOD

(From "Gandhiji's Post-prayer Speeches")

The *bhajan* of the evening said that man's highest endeavour lay in trying to find God, said Gandhiji. He could not be found in temples or idols, or places of worship built by man's hands, nor could He be found by abstinences. God could be found only through love, not earthly, but divine. That love was lived by Mirabai who saw God in everything. He was all in all to her.

Harijan, 23-11-'47, p. 421 at p. 425

47
HOW I ESTABLISH COMMUNION WITH GOD

(From the summary by M. D. of Gandhiji's concluding discourse at the Gandhi Seva Sangh meeting which appeared under the title "The Concluding Discourse".)

I do not know whether I am a Karmayogi or any other Yogi. I know that I cannot live without work. I crave to die with my hand at the spinning wheel. If one has to establish communion with God through some means, why not through the spinning wheel? "Him who worships Me," says the Lord in the Gita, "I guide along the right path and see to his needs." My God is myriad-formed, and while sometimes I see Him in the spinning wheel, at other times I see Him in communal unity, then again in removal of untouchability; and that is how I establish communion with Him according as the Spirit moves me.

Harijan, 8-5-'37, p. 97 at p. 99

48
SERVICE OF GOD

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

Another Sadhu, a leader of the Harijans, one day came in with a curious poser: "How can we serve God when we do not know God?'

"We may not know God but we know His creation," said Gandhiji. "Service of His creation is the service of God."

"But how can we serve the whole of God's creation?"

"We can but serve that part of God's creation which is nearest and best known to us. We can start with next-door neighbour. We should not be content with keeping our countryard clean, we should see that our neighbour's countryard is also clean. We may serve our family, but may not sacrifice the village for the sake of the family. Our own honour lies in the preservation of thatof our own village. But we must each of us understand our own limitations. Our capacity for service is automatically limited by our knowledge of the world in which we live. But let me put it in the simplest possible language. Let us think less of ourselves than of our next-door neighbour. Dumping the refuse of our countryard into that of our neighbour is no service of humanity, but disservice. Let us start with the service of our neighbours."

Harijan, 22-8-'36, p. 217

49
A MATTER OF FAITH AND EXPERIENCE

(From "Question Box")

Q. : God cannot be realized through reason. He has to be understood through faith. Do you believe in rebirth or is it that the Hindu seers propounded it, in order to enable people to appreciate the significance of good and evil deeds and derive some satisfaction from the belief ?

A. : God cannot be realized through the intellect. Intellect can lead one to a certain extent and no further. It is a matter of faith and experience derived from that faith. One might rely on the experience of one's betters or else be satisfied with nothing less than personal experience. Full faith does not feel the want of experience. The distinction between good and evil is not meant to act as a consolation. Nor is faith in God meant for that purpose. The seers have held that there is good and evil and there is rebirth. I think this theory of reincarnation is capable of being understood by the intellect.

Harijan, 4-8-'46, p. 249

50
ADVAITISM AND GOD

[In answer to a friend's questions, Gandhiji wrote :]

I am an *advaitist* and yet I can support *dvaitism* (dualism). The world is changing every moment, and is therefore unreal, it has no permament existence. But though it is constantly changing, it has a something about it which persists and it is therefore to that extent real. I have therefore no objection to calling it real and unreal, and thus being called an *anekantavadi* or a *syadvadi.* But my *syadvada* is not the *syadvada* of the learned, it is peculiarly my own. I cannot engage in a debate with them. It has been my experience that I am always true from my point of view, and am often wrong from the point of view of my honest critics. I know that we are both right from our respective points of view. And this knowledge saves me from attributing motives to my opponents or critics. The seven blind men who gave seven different descriptions of the elephant were all right from their respective points of view, and wrong from the point of view of one another, and right and wrong from the point of view of the man who knew the elephant. I very much like this doctrine of the manyness of reality. It is this doctrine that has taught me to judge a Mussulman from his own standpoint and a Christian from his. Formerly I used to resent the ignorance of my opponents. Today I can love them because

I am gifted with the eye to see myself as others see me and vice versa. I want to take the whole world in the embrace of my love. My *anekantavada* is the result of the twin doctrine of *satya* and *ahimsa.*

I talk of God exactly as I believe Him to be. I believe Him to be creative as well as non-creative. This too is the result of my acceptance of the doctrine of the manyness of reality. From the platform of the Jains I prove the non-creative aspect of God, and from that of Ramanuja the creative aspect. As a matter of fact we are all thinking of the Unthinkable, describing the Indescribable, seeking to know the Unknown, and that is why our speech falters, is inadequate and even often contradictory. That is why the *Vedas* describe *Brahman* as 'not this', 'not this'. But if He or It is not this, He or It *is*. If we exist, if our parents and their parents have existed, then it is proper to believe in the Parent of the whole creation. If He is not, we are nowhere. And that is why all of us with one voice call one God differently as *Paramatma, Ishwara,* Shiva, Vishnu, Rama, Allah, *Khuda,* Dada Hormuzda, Jehova, God, and an infinite variety of names. He is one and yet many; He is smaller than an atom, and bigger than the Himalayas. He is contained even in a drop of the ocean, and yet not even the seven seas can compass Him. Reason is powerless to know Him. He is beyond the reach or grasp of reason. But I need not labour the point. Faith is essential in this matter. My logic can make and unmake innumerable hypotheses. An atheist might floor me in a debate. But my faith runs so very much faster than my reason that I can challenge the whole world and say, "God is, was and ever shall be.'

But those who want to deny His existence are at liberty to do so. He is merciful and compassionate. He is not an earthly king needing an army to make us accept His sway. He allows us freedom, and yet His compassion commands obedience to His will. But if any one of us disdain to bow to His will, He says: 'So be it. My sun will shine no less for thee, my clouds will rain no less for thee. I need not force thee to accept My sway.' Of such a God let the ignorant dispute the existence. I

am one of the millions of wise men who believe in Him and am never tired of bowing to Him and singing His glory.

Young India, 21-1-'26

51
NO CONTRADICTION BETWEEN THE JAIN AND THE VEDIC DOCTRINE

[Purushottam Gandhi writing from Rajkot asked Gandhiji three questions : '(1) What is the difference between the so-called atheism of the Jains and the theism of the Gita? (2) If God is not a doer, who dispenses grace? Is prayer anything more than the expression of a person's wishes? (3) What do you mean when you say that Truth is God?' To him Gandhiji replied as follows :]

I do not think there is any contradiction between the Jain and the Vedic doctrine. They are only different ways of looking at the same thing. The God of Vedic Hinduism is doer as well as non-doer. God pervades the universe and is therefore a doer, but He is a non-doer inasmuch as action does not affect Him, and He has not to enjoy the fruit of action. The universe is not the result of any *karma* (action) of God in the sense in which you use that word. Therefore there is no discrepancy in the Gita verses quoted by you. Remember that the Gita is a poem. God neither says nor does anything. He did not say anything to Arjuna. The conversation between the Lord and Arjuna is imaginary. I do not think there was any such conversation between the Krishna and the Arjuna of history. There is nothing improper or untruthrul in the setting of the Gita. There was a custom of casting religious books into such a shape, and we cannot find fault with any cultured individual even today who employs such a vehicle for his ideas. The Jains put it logically, unpoetically and drily and said that there is no Creator of the universe. There is nothing wrong in saying so. However, mankind cannot live by logic alone, but needs poetry. Therefore, even the Jain rationalists found it necessary to have temples, images and similar aids for the spirit of man, which are ruled out by the mere logic.

In answering your first question I have in effect also answered the second. Grace is the diction of poetry. Devotion *(bhakti)* is itself poetry. But poetry is no improper or inferior or unnecessary thing. On the contrary it is badly needed. Science would tell us that water is a chemical compound of hydrogen and oxygen, but in the language of poetry water is the gift of God. Understanding such poetry is an essential element of life, while ignorance of the chemical composition of water does not matter in the least. It is perfectly logical to say that whatever happens is the fruit of action. But 'impenetrable is the secret of action' (Gita IV, 17). We mortals are so constituted that we cannot know all the causative factors of even a very ordinary event. We are therefore perfectly right in saying that nothing happens except by the will and the grace of God. Again the body is a prison for the soul, who is like the air enclosed by a jar. The air in the jar is ineffective so long as it thinks itself to be different from the atmosphere. In the same way the soul imprisoned in the body will be unable to draw upon the Reservoir of Power that is God so long as she imagines herself to be a doer. Therefore to say that whatever happens happens by the will of God is to state a matter of fact, and such humility befits a seeker of truth. A lover of truth entertains only righteous wishes which are bound to be fulfilled. Our prayers bear fruit for the world to the extent that our soul is grounded in truth. The universe is not different from us, and we are not different from the universe. We are all members one of another, and influence one another by our actions. Actions here include thoughts, so that not a single thought is without its effect. Therefore we must cultivate the habit of always thinking good thoughts.

I say that truth is God not because God is without form and so is truth, but because truth is the only comprehensive attribute of God. Other attribute are only partial expressions of the reality that is God. The Gujarati word *Ishwara* (the Lord) is also a descriptive epithet of God but as it literally means ruler, it sounds quite insipid. Thinking of God as the King of kings does not satisfy the intellect. Such a line of thought may

generate a kind of fear in our minds, so that we are afraid of committing sin and are encouraged in doing meritorious deeds. But merit acquired out of fear almost ceases to be merit. Let us do good for its own sake, and not in order to win a reward. Pondering over the matter like this, I found that 'God is truth' is an incomplete sentence. 'Truth is God' is the fullest expression of our meaning in so far as it can be set forth in human speech. We arrive at the same conclusion if we consider the etymology of the word *satya* (truth), which is derived from *sat*. *Sat* means eternal. That which exists at all times is truth. It alone is, everything else is not. But while we learn to recognize God as truth, we must not allow our faith to weaken. On the other hand it should grow stronger. Such at any rate is my experience. By looking upon truth as God we steer clear of quite a number of dangers. We lose all interest in seeing or hearing about miracles. Seeing God is difficult to understand; but seeing truth presents no such difficulty. Seeing truth is indeed a hard task, but as we approach nearer and nearer to truth we catch a glimpse of the God of truth, so that we hope to have a full view in His good time and our faith also burns brighter and brighter.

(Translated from Gujarati)

SECTION THREE
FAITH AND REASON

52
THE ONLY HELP OF THE HELPLESS
I

(From 'Weekly Letter" by M. D. — an extract from Gandhiji's address to the students of Mysore)

I have come in contact with thousands of students during the last ten years. They have confided their innermost secrets to me and have given me the right to enter their hearts. I know, therefore, all your difficulties and every one of your weaknesses. I do not know whether I can render any effective help to you. I can but be your friend and guide, attempt to share your sorrows, and give you the benefit of my experience, though you must know that the only Help of the helpless is God. There is no greater punishment or misery for man than that his faith in God should be blasted. And I confess to a deep sense of sorrow that faith is gradually disappearing in the student world. When I suggest to a Hindu boy to have recourse to Ramanama he stares at me and wonders who Rama may be; when I ask a Musalman boy to read the Koran and fear God, he confesses his inability to read the Koran and Allah is a mere lip-profession. How can I convince such boys that the first step to a true education is a pure heart ? If the education you get turns you away from God, I do not know how it is going to help you and how you are going to help the world. You were right in saying in your address, that I am endeavouring to see God through service of humanity, for I know that God is neither in heaven nor down below, but in every one, be he a Hindu, Brahmana, Kshatriya, Vaishya, Shudra, or a Panchama, a Musalman, a Parsi, a Christian — man or woman.

Young India, 4-8-'27, p. 242 at p. 247

II

(The following extract is reproduced from Gandhiji's address at a students' meaning in Rangoon which originally appeared under the title "To the Students".)

I know from correspondence with the students all over India what wrecks they have become by having stuffed their brains with information derived from a cartload of books. Some have become unhinged, others have become lunatics, some have been leading a life of helpless immaturity. My heart goes out to them when they say that try as much as they might, they are what they are, because they cannot overpower the devil. "Tell us", they plaintively ask, "how to get rid of the devil, how to get rid of the impurity that has seized us." When I ask them to take Ramanama and kneel before God and seek His help, they come to me and say, "We do not know where God is. We do not know what it is to pray." That is the state to which they have been reduced. I have, therefore, been asking the students to be on their guard.... Never own a defeat in a sacred cause and make up your minds henceforth that you *will* be pure and that you *will* find a response from God. But God never answers the prayers of the arrogant, nor the prayers of those who bargain with Him. Have you heard the story of *Gajendra Moksha?* I ask the Burmese students here who do not know one of the greatest of all poems, one of the divinest things of the world, to learn it from their Indian friends. A Tamil saying has always remained in my memory and it means, God is the help of the helpless. If you would ask Him to help you, you would go to Him in all your nakedness, approach Him without reservations, also without fear or doubts as to how He can help a fallen being like you. He who has helped millions, who have approached Him, is He going to desert you? He makes no exceptions whatsoever and you will find that everyone of your prayers will be answered. The prayer of even the most impure will be answered. I am telling this out of my personal experience, I have gone through the purgatory. Seek first the Kingdom of Heaven and everything will be added unto you.

Young India, 4-4-'29, p. 110

53

THE STRENGTH OF THE VOTARY OF TRUTH

(The following extracts are reproduced from a speech of Gandhiji which appeared under the title "Hindu-Muslim Question".)

A Satyagrahi has no power he can call his own. All the power he may seem to possess is from and of God. He, therefore, moves towards his goal carrying the world's opinion with him. Without the help of God he is lame, blind, groping.

Ever since 1921 I have been reiterating two words, 'self-purification' and 'self-sacrifice'. God will not assist him without these two. The world is touched by sacrifice. It does not then discriminate about the merits of a cause. Not so God. He is all seeing. He insists on the purity of the cause and on adequate sacrifice therefor.

Young India, 3-4-'30, p. 117

54

OBEY HIS LAW

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal. English translation of Gandhiji's written message in Hindustani on his silence day is given below.)

So long as we believe that all is from God, we would have no cause for perturbation. The only condition is that whatever we do, we should do with God as witness. It is He who makes the world go and we only reap the consequences of our actions. Therefore, ours is only to obey His law and then be indifferent as to the result.

Harijan, 23-6-'46, p. 185

55
RESIGN YOURSELF TO HIS WILL
I

(An extract from a gist of Gandhiji's Hindustani speech at an evening prayer in Simla as given by Pyarelal which appeared under the title "Introspection" is reproduced below.)

I did not know that I would have to come to Simla this time. If we have faith in God we simply would not care to know beforehand how He may dispose of us. It is enough for us to hold ourselves perfectly in readiness for whatever happens. We are not allowed to know what tomorrow has in store for us and our best conceived plans have a knack very often of going awry. The highest wisdom, therefore, is never to worry about the future but to resign ourselves entirely to His will.

Harijan, 12-5-'46, p. 130

II

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

Commenting on the allegory of *Gajendra* and *Graha,* the elephant king and the alligator that adorns the Bhagawata, Gandhiji remarked:

"The moral of the story is that God never fails his devotees in the hour of trial. The condition is that there must be a living faith in and the uttermost reliance on Him. The test of faith is that having done our duty we must be prepared to welcome whatever He may send — joy as well as sorrow, good luck as well as bad.... A man of prayer will in the first place be spared mishaps by the ever merciful Providence but if the mishaps do come he will not bewail his fate but bear it with an undisturbed peace of mind and joyous resignation to His will."

Harijan, 7-7'46, p. 215 at p. 216

56
MAKE GOD YOUR SHIELD

(Following is an extract from the summary of Gandhiji's address while presiding over 16th Anniversary of Prema Vidyalaya, Tadikhet. The summary appeared in an article of Shri Pyarelal which was originally published under the title "The Almoda Tour - II".)

Gandhiji's programme for the week commenced with a visit to the Prema Vidyalaya at Tadikhet where Gandhiji halted for a couple of days. Prema Vidyalaya is a child of the non-co-operation movement and was started in 1921 as a purely national institution.... The institution is housed in its own building. Of late it has encountered much rough weather but has managed to keep above the storm. Its anniversary celebration on the 16th instant over which Gandhiji presided was an impressive function and attracted large crowds from the surrounding villages. Gandhiji's speech therefore naturally partook of a general character and gave in a nutshell his message to the people of these hills. "I heard the tale of your woes," he began, "even before I came here but the remedy lies in your hands. Its name is self-purification. We are today weighed down by our own selfishness and parochialism of outlook, we must cast it out. We know how to die for our family but it is time that we learnt to go a step further. We must widen the circle of our love till it embraces the whole village, the village in its turn must take into fold the district, the district the province, and so on till the scope of our love becomes co-terminous with the world.... You must cultivate self-confidence and make God your shield. There is none mightier than He. A man who throws himself on God ceases to fear man."

Young India, 27-6-'29, p. 213 at p. 214

57
NEVER LOSE FAITH IN GOD

(The following extract is taken from a sermon of Gandhiji to students of a school in Trichur as summarized by M. D. in his "Weekly Letter".)

Religious and moral instruction is nothing but character-building. So I say to the boys and girls: Never lose faith in God, and therefore, in yourselves and remember that if you allow refuge to a single evil thought, a single sinful thought, remember that you lack that faith. Untruthfulness, uncharitableness, violence, sensuality, all these things are strangers to that faith. Remember that we have in this world no enemy greater than ourselves. The Bhagavadgita proclaims it in almost every verse. If I was to sum up the teaching of the Sermon on the Mount I find the same answer. My reading of the Koran has led me to the same conclusion. No one can harm us so much as we can ourselves. If you are, therefore, brave boys and brave girls you will fight desperately and valiantly against the whole brood of these thoughts. No sinful act was ever done in this world without the prompting of a sinful thought. You have to exercise strict vigilance over every thought welling up in your breast. Many students, both boys and girls, have often told me that whilst they understand with their intellect the force of my remarks, they find it impossible in practice to control their thoughts, and thus they give up the struggle and give way to despair, and then finding some evil books to stimulate themselves they nurse the evil thoughts. I want to draw a sharp distinction between the two processes that happen within us. Except for perfect beings evil thoughts will arise in every breast. Hence it is necessary for us to offer incessant prayer to God to keep us free from evil thoughts. That is the process which does us good. The other process is to think evil thoughts and take delight in them. It is the most dangerous and harmful process and it is the process which I invite you to fight with all your might.

Young India, 27-10-'27, p. 362

58
FORCE FINER THAN ELECTRICITY

(From "A Dangerous Proposal")

If the leaders of different religions in India ceased to compete with one another for enticing Harijans into their fold, it would be well for this unfortunate country. I have the profound conviction that those who are engaged in the competition are not serving the cause of religion. By looking at it in terms of politics or economics they reduce the religious values, whereas the proper thing would be to estimate politics and every other thing in terms of religion. Religion deals with the science of the soul. Great as the other forces of the world are, if there is such a thing as God, soul force is the greatest of all. We know as a matter of fact that the greater the force the finer it is. Hitherto electricity has held the field among the finer physical powers. And yet nobody has seen it except through its wonderful results. Scientific speculation dares to talk of a force finer even than that of electricity. But no instrument devised by man has been able to know anything positive of soul force or spiritual force. It is on that force that the true religious reformer has hitherto relied and never without hope fulfilled. It is that force which will finally govern the welfare of Harijans and everyone else and confound the calculations of men however gifted they may be intellctually. The reformer who has entered upon the duty of ridding Hinduism of the disease of untouchability has to depend in everything he does on that force and nothing else.

Harijan, 22-8-'36. p. 220

59
THE PROMISE OF THE LORD

(The following is a summary of a talk on Gita given by Gandhiji to Ashramites at a morning prayer meeting which appeared in an article called "The Week" by M.D.)

The evening talk, whenever he (Gandhiji) gives one is devoted to topics arising out of the everyday life of the members. The morning ones are almost always about some thought or other from the Gita. No elaborate comment. Just a few words or sentences on the chapter recited, to serve as a sort of approach to the chapter. For instance : "Chapter nine contains what I would describe as the healing balm for us afflicted mortals — afflicted not only with physical ills, but with ills of the spirit. The chapter contains the promise of God to all erring mortals, nay, even to those who may be 'born from the very womb of sin'. Those that turn to Him shall have no cause to grieve. The chapter also shows that the Gita was written when *Varnashrama* had ceased to exist in its pristine purity and had come to mean, as it does today, a classification of high and low. Let us forget that, and remember that the promise is given to all — अपि चेत्सुदुराचारो — even if they be steeped in sin. And when we are all steeped in sin, more or less, who dare cast the stone at whom? 'Be thou certain, none can perish, trusting Me,' says the Lord, but let it not be understood to mean that our sins will be washed away by merely trusting Him without any striving. Only he who struggles hard against the allurements of sense objects, and turns in tears and grief to the Lord, will be comforted."

Again, Chapters eleven and twelve : "What can more forcefully turn one to God than this panoramic vision of His multitudinous manifestations, and having thus prepared us for Bhakti, the Lord gives us the essence of Bhakti in the twelfth Chapter which is so brief that any one can commit it to memory to call it to his aid in moments of trial.

"Chapter fourteen and the threefold division of the qualities of nature remind me of Henry Drummond's book I

read about 30 years ago — *The Natural Law in the Spiritual World.* The laws are numerous but they have been broadly classified under three heads. The fourteenth Chapter describes the laws to which man is subject and the fifteenth describes Purushottama the Perfect Man. The 'ascent of man' is what we have to learn from these chapters. There is no man who is governed exclusively by one of the three *gunas* — *sattva, rajas* or *tamas.* We have each of us to rise to a state in which we are governed predominantly by the *sattva* principle, until at last we rise beyond the three and are 'Perfect Man'. I can think of an illustration from the physical world. Take water, which in its solid state remains on the earth; it cannot ascend until it is rarefied into steam. But once it is rarefied into steam it rises up in the sky where at last it is transformed into clouds which drop down in the form of rain and fructify and bless the earth. We are all like water, we have to strive so to rarefy ourselves that all the ego in us perishes and we merge in the Infinite to the eternal good of all."

Young India, 12-1-'28, p. 10

60
GOD'S COVENANT

(Gist of the speech at a prayer meeting in Congress House, Bombay as it appeared in 'Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

You will wonder why I consented to have a prayer meeting in Bombay, when even the existence of God is with many a matter of doubt. There are others who say: 'If God is seated in the heart of everyone, who shall pray to whom, who shall invoke whom?' I am not here to solve these intellectual puzzles. I can only say that ever since my childhood prayer has been my solace and my strength.

...There are those who are struck with doubt and despair. For them there is the name of God. It is God's covenant that whoever goes to Him in weakness and helplessness, him He will make strong. 'When I am weak, then I am strong.' As the

Poet Surdas has sung, Rama is the strength of the weak. This strength is not to be obtained by taking up arms or by similar means. It is to be had by throwing oneself on His name. Rama is but a synonym of God. You may say God or Allah or whatever other name you like, but the moment you trust naught but Him, you are strong, all disappointment disappears. The hymn alludes to the story of the Lord of elephants who was in the jaws of a crocodile and who had been all but drowned in water. There was only the tip of his trunk left above water when he invoked God's name and he was saved. No doubt it is an allegory. But it conceals a truth. Over and over again in my life have I found it. Even in darkest despair, when there seems no helper and no comfort in the wide wide world, His name inspires us with strength and puts all doubts and despair to flight. The sky may be overcast today with clouds, but a fervent prayer to Him is enough to dispel them. It is because of prayer that I have known no disappointment.... Let us pray that He may cleanse our hearts of pettinesses, meannesses and deceit, and He will surely answer our prayers.

Harijan, 1-6-'35, p. 121 at p. 123

61
LIVING FAITH IN GOD, INDISPENSABLE FOR A SATYAGRAHI

I

(From "The New Technique" by M.D.; a summary of Gandhiji's address to the fifth session of the Gandhi Seva Sangh which met at Brindaban in Champaran, Bihar.)

Now a Satyagrahi should have a living faith in God. That is because he has no other strength but that of his unflinching faith in Him. Without that faith how can he undertake Satyagraha? I would ask any of you who feels that he has no such faith to leave the Gandhi Seva Sangh, and to forget the name of Satyagraha.

Harijan, 13-5-'39, p. 121 at p. 122

II

(From “Gandhi Seva Sangh - IV” by M.D.)

Referring to the above part of Gandhiji’s address, one of the members asked if some of the Socialists and Communists who did not believe in God could not be Satyagrahis, Gandhiji replied as follows:

“I am afraid not. For a Satyagrahi has no other stay but God, and he who has any other stay or depends on any other help cannot offer Satyagraha. He may be a passive resister, non-co-operator and so on, but not a true Satyagrahi. It is open to you to argue that this excludes brave comrades, whereas it may include men who profess belief in God but who in the daily lives are untrue to their profession. I am not talking of those who are untrue to their profession, I am talking of those who are prepared in the name of God to stake their all for the sake of their principle. Don’t ask me again why I am enunciating this principle today and did not do so twenty years ago. I can only say that I am no prophet, I am but an erring mortal, progressing from blunder towards truth. ‘What about the Buddhists and Jains, then?’ someone has asked. Well, I will say that if the Buddhists and Jains raise this objection themselves, and say that they would be disqualified if such a strict rule were observed, I should say to them that I agree with them.

“But far be it from me to suggest that you should believe in the God that I believe in. May be your definition is different from mine, but your belief in that God must be your ultimate mainstay. It may be some Supreme Power or some Being even indefinable, but belief in it is indispensable. To bear all kinds of tortures without a murmur of resentment is impossible for a human being without the strength that comes from God. Only in His strength we are strong. And only those who can cast their cares and their fears on that Immeasurable Power have faith in God.”

Harijan, 3-6-’39, p. 145 at p. 146

62
TEST OF FAITH

(Some portions from the article, “On That Hallowed Spot” by M.D. are reproduced herein below.)

The month preceding the inauguration of the campaign of civil disobedience has been full of trial and tribulation for the members of the Ashram, and day in and day out Gandhiji has poured out his soul at the morning and evening prayers on that patch of ground which may yet be called by the sacred name of “Satyagrahashram”. The spot is exclusively used for prayers, and the idea behind confining the sacred name to that small area is that that, if any, is the spot where the inmates gather together for communion, having cast off for the moment, the trammels of the flesh and in a spirit of complete submission to truth and non-violence — Satyagraha.

But even outside the prayer ground that pursuit of truth and non-violence is there, that striving after practising the teaching of the Gita, the verses of which we recite morning and evening, is there. But nothing had yet happened to test the genuineness of that striving. The test, however, came in the shape of the epidemic of smallpox which, in spite of the utmost care and nursing bestowed on the patients, carried away three promising children of the Ashram. Mourning and demonstrations of grief were out of the question; but that was not enough. All, including the parents, were to go through the day’s duties as though nothing had happened. And all stood the test well. No more than the minimum necessary went to the burning *ghat,* there was no break in the work allotted to the rest, and even the parents of the children did not miss their prayers or their sacrificial spinning. They refused to make any distinction between what the world regards as an occasion of grief and an occasion of rejoicing. Within two days of the death of a boy came the day (previously fixed) of the wedding of a girl. It was gone through with all the solemnity that a sacred rite requires, and Gandhiji spoke on the restraining quality of marriage with as much fervour as on the benignant quality of death.

But the trial was perhaps greater for Gandhiji than for the inmates of the Ashram. He had to go through a heart-searching that others had no reason to go through. They had simply to refrain from giving way to grief. He had to cast the search-light inward and examine every one of his actions and plans. Having been a staunch opponent of vaccination all his life, he would not persuade the inmates to get their children vaccinated. Of course every one was free to do so and was offered all facilities. There were protests from friends who implored him not to take the grave risk he was doing, and to make the inmates be vaccinated or revaccinated as the case might be. "How can I go back on the principles I have held dear all my life, when I find that it is these principles that are being put to the test?" he said at the prayer. "I have no doubt in my mind that vaccination is a filthy process, that it is harmful in the end and that it is little short of taking beef. I may be entirely mistaken. But holding the views that I do, how can I recant them? Because I see child after child passing away? No, not even if the whole of the Ashram were to be swept away, may I insist on vaccination and pocket my principle. What would my love of truth and adherence to principle mean, if they were to vanish at the slightest touch of reality?... But God is putting me through a greater test. On the eve of what is to be the final test of our strength, God is warning me through the messenger of death. I have tried hydropathy and earth treatment with success in numerous cases. Never has the treatment failed as it seems to have done during the month. But does that mean that I must therefore lose faith in the treatment and faith in God? Even so my faith in the efficacy of non-violence may be put to the severest test. I may have to see not three but hundreds and thousands being done to death during the campaign I am about to launch. Shall my heart quail before that catastrophe, or will I persevere in my faith? No, I want you every one to understand that this epidemic is not a scourge, but a trial and preparation, a tribulation sent to steel our hearts and to chain us more strongly and firmly to faith in God. And would not my faith in

Gita be mockery if three deaths were to unhinge me? It is as clear to me as daylight that life and death are but phases of the same thing, the reverse and obverse of the same coin. In fact tribulation and death seem to me to present a phase far richer than happiness or life. What is life worth without trials and tribulation which are the salt of life? The history of mankind would have been a blank sheet without these individuals. What is Ramayana but a record of the trials, privations and penances of Rama and Sita? The life of Rama, after recovery of Sita, full of happiness as it was, does not occupy even a hundredth part of the epic. I want you all to treasure death and suffering more than life, and to appreciate their cleansing and purifying character."

Young India, 12-3-'30, p. 95

63
TRUE FAITH

(From a summary of the speech by Gandhiji in Masulipatam which appeared in the article "In Andhra Desh")

Let your faith be not found wanting when it is weighed in the balance. That faith is of little value which can flourish only in fair weather. Faith in order to be of any value has to survive the severest trials. Your faith is a whited sepulchre if it cannot stand against the calumny of the whole world.

Young India, 25-4-'29, p. 133 at p. 134

64
THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

(One Swami Yoganand asked Gandhiji, "Why is there evil in the world?" Gandhiji's reply to the question and the conversation that ensued thereafter between the two is reproduced below from 'Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

" 'Why is there evil in the world', said Gandhiji, "is a difficult question to answer. I can only give what I may call a villager's answer. If there is good, there must also be evil, just as where there is light there is also darkness, but it is true only so far as we human mortals are concerned. Before God there is nothing good, nothing evil. We poor villagers may talk of His dispensation in human terms, but our language is not God's.

"The Vedanta says the world is *maya.* Even that explanation is a babbling of imperfect humanity. I, therefore, say that I am not going to bother my head about it. Even if I was allowed to peep into the innermost recess of God's chamber I should not care to do it. For I should not know what to do there. It is enough for our spiritual growth to know that God is always with the doer of good. That again is a villager's explanation."

"But if He is All-mighty, as unquestionably He is, why does He not free us from evil?" asked the Swami.

"I would rule out this question too. God and we are not equals. Equals may put such questions to one another, but not unequals. Villagers do not ask why town-dwellers do things which, if they did, would mean certain destruction."

"I quite see what you mean," said the Swami. "It is a strong point you have made. But who made God?"

"If He is All-powerful, He must have made Himself."

"Do you think He is an autocrat or a democrat?"

"I do not think these things at all. I do not want to divide the power with Him and hence I am absolved from having to consider these questions. I am content with the doing of the task in front of me. I do not worry about the why and wherefore of things."

"But has He not given us reason?"

"Indeed He has. But that reason helps us to see that we should not dabble in things we cannot fathom. It is my implicit belief that a true villager has an amazing amount of common sense and therefore he never worries about these things."

"Then I will now ask a different question. Do you believe it is easier to be evil than good, that a descent is easier than an ascent?"

"Apparently it is so. But really it is easier to be good than to be evil. Of course poets have said that descent to hell is easy, but I do not think so. Nor do I think there are more bad people in the world than good. In that case God Himself would be evil and not an embodiment of Ahimsa or love which He is."

"May I know your definition of Ahimsa?"

"Ahimsa means avoiding injury to anything on earth, in thought, word and deed."

That led into ramifications into which I may not go. The question of Ahimsa has been discussed over and over again in the pages of *Harijan* and *Young India.*

Harijan, 7-9-'35, p. 233

65
CONDEMNATION OF EVIL

(In reply to a correspondent who complained against the non-co-operators employing abusive language in denouncing the Government, Gandhiji wrote an article called "What is Abuse?" from which the following extracts are taken.)

In so far as non-co-operators indulge in abuse, it is undoubtedly violence, and a breach of the pledge of non-violence.... But after all, what is abuse? I find that the dictionary meaning is 'misuse, perversion, bad use'. When therefore we call a thief a thief or a rogue a rogue, we do not abuse him. A leper takes no offence, being described as such. Only the man using a particular adjective must mean it and be prepared to prove it. I am, therefore, unable to condemn the use of adjectives in every case and on every occasion, nor is

the use of condemnatory adjectives always a sign of violence. I am fully aware that the use of even deserved adjectives may be a sign of violence, as it would be when it is used to excite violence against the person condemned. Condemnation is legitimately used when it is employed to wean the person from his bad habit or the audience from association with him. The Hindu Shastras are full of condemnation of evil-doers. They have pronounced curses upon them. Tulasidas who was the quality of mercy personified has filled the Ramayana with adjectives against the enemies of Rama which it would be difficult to excel. Indeed the names themselves chosen for the evil-doers are significant of their qualities. Jesus did not hesitate to draw down divine wrath upon those whom he called 'a generation of vipers, hypocrites, whited sepulchres'. Buddha did not spare those who killed the innocent goats in the name of religion. Nor are the Koran or the Zend Avesta free from such use. Only all these seers and prophets had no evil intention in them. They had to describe persons and things as they were, and resort to language so as to enable us to make our choice between good and evil. Having said this much, I am at one with the writer that the more sparing we are, in describing the Government or the Governors, the better it is for us. There is too much passion and too much evil in ourselves to warrant the constant use of offensive language. The best use we can make of this Government is to ignore its existence and to isolate it as much as possible from our life, believing that contact with it is corrupting and degrading.

Young India, 17-11-'21, p. 372

66

HATE NOT MEN BUT THEIR EVIL WAYS

(From paragraphs which originally appeared in the "Notes" under the title "An English Lady Blesses")

An English lady wrote to Gandhiji to convey her blessings to his non-co-operation movement. Commenting on it, Gandhiji observed: "It is not without hesitation that I share this letter with the reader. Although written impersonally, it is so personal. But I hope there is no pride in me. I feel I recognize fully my weakness. But my faith in God and His strength and love is unshakable. I am like clay in the Potter's hands. And so in the language of the Gita, the compliments are laid at His feet. The blessings such as these, I confess, are strength-giving. But my reason for publishing this letter is to encourage every true non-co-operator in the non-violent path he is pursuing, and to wean the false ones from their error. This is a terribly true struggle. It is not based on hate though men of hate are in it. It is a struggle which is based on love, pure and undefiled. If I felt any hate towards Englishmen or those who in their blindness are associated with the blind administrators, I have the courage to retire from the struggle. A man who has the least faith in God and His mercy, which is his justice, cannot hate men, though, at the same time, he must hate their evil ways. But having abundant evil in himself and ever standing in need of charity, he must not hate those in whom he sees evil. This struggle, therefore, is intended to make friends with Englishmen, and the whole world. It cannot be false flattery but, by painly telling Englishmen of India that their ways are evil and that we will not co-operate with them so long as they retain them. If we are wrong in so thinking, God will forgive us for we mean no ill to them and we are prepared to suffer at their hands. If we are right, as sure as I am writing this, our suffering will open their eyes even as it has opened those of 'an English lady'.

Young India, 26-1-'22, p. 49

67
I HATE ALL EVIL BUT NOT INDIVIDUALS

(From "Do I Hate Englishmen?")

I hold myself to be incapable of hating any being on earth. By a long course of prayerful discipline I have ceased for over forty years to hate anybody. I know that this is a big claim. Nevertheless, I make it in all humility. But I can and do hate evil wherever it exists. I hate the system of Government that the British people have set up in India. I hate the domineering manner of Englishmen as a class in India. I hate the ruthless exploitation of India even as I hate from the bottom of my heart the hideous system of untouchability for which millions of Hindus have made themselves responsible. But I do not hate the domineering Englishmen as I refuse to hate the domineering Hindus. I seek to reform them in all the loving ways that are open to me. My non-co-operation has its root not in hatred, but in love. My personal religion peremptorily forbids me to hate anybody. I learnt this simple yet grand doctrine when I was twelve years old through a school book and the conviction has persisted up to now. It is daily growing on me. It is a burning passion with me. I beg, therefore, to assure every Englishman, who, like these friends, might have misunderstood me, that I shall never be guilty of hating Englishmen even though I might have to fight them fiercely, even as I did in 1921. It will be a non-violent fight, it will be clean, it will be truthful.

Mine is not an exclusive love. I cannot love Musalmans or Hindus and hate Englishmen. For if I love merely Hindus and Musalmans because their ways are on the whole pleasing to me, I shall soon begin to hate them when their ways displease me as they may well do any moment. A love that is based on the goodness of those whom you love is a mercenary affair, whereas true love is self-effacing and demands no consideration. It is like that of a model Hindu wife, Sita, for instance, who loved her Rama even whilst he bid her pass through a raging fire. It was well with Sita, for she knew what

she was doing. She sacrificed herself out of her strength, not out of her weakness. Love is the strongest force the world possesses and yet it is the humblest imaginable.

Young India, 6-8-'25, p. 272

68
IS BELIEF IN GOD SUPERSTITION ?

(From "Frontier Notes - III" by Pyarelal)

A professor of Islamia College came with a question that was troubling him and is troubling many of the present generation — belief in God. What was the basis of his belief, if Gandhiji had it, as he knew he had it? What was his experience? "It can never be a matter for argument," said Gandhiji. "If you would have me convince others by argument I am floored. But I can tell you this that I am surer of His existence than of the fact that you and I are sitting in this room. Then I can also testify that I may live without air and water but not without Him. You may pluck out my eyes, but that cannot kill me. You may chop off my nose, but that will not kill me. But blast by belief in God, and I am dead. You may call this a superstition, but I confess it is a superstition that I hug, even as I used to hug the name of Rama in my childhood when there was any cause of danger or alarm. That was what an old nurse had taught me."

"But you think that superstition was necessary for you?"

"Yes, necessary to sustain me."

Harijan, 14-5-'38, p. 109

69

REASON AND ITS PLACE

(From an undated letter of Gandhiji to Prof. P. G. Mathews)

Reason has its place, only it must not usurp the heart. If you will go through any twenty-four hours of the life of the most reasoning man you know, you will find that most of his acts done during that time are done by feeling, not by reasoning. The moral is that reason once developed acts automatically and rejects what is superstitious or immoral if the heart is sound. Reason is a corrective and is in its place when it remains at the door ever watchful, never moving.... Life is duty, i.e. action. When this is reasoned away, reason has become a usurper and must be dethroned.

Harijan, 12-12-'48, p. 346

70

MY SEAT OF AUTHORITY

(From "Weekly Letter" by M.D.)

Q. : Where do you find the seat of authority?

Gandhiji : It lies here (pointing to his breast). I exercise my judgment about every scripture, including the Gita. I cannot let a scriptural text supersede my reason. Whilst I believe that the principal books are inspired, they suffer from a process of double distillation. Firstly they come through a human prophet, and then through the commentaries of interpreters. Nothing in them comes from God directly. Matthew may give one version of one text and John may give another. I cannot surrender my reason whilst I subscribe to divine revelation. And above all, 'the letter killeth, the spirit giveth life'. But you must not misunderstand my position. I believe in faith also, in things where reason has no place, e.g. the existence of God. No argument can move me from that faith, and like that little girl who repeated against all reason 'yet we are seven' I would like to repeat, on being baffled in argument by a very superior intellect, 'Yet there is God.'

Harijan, 5-12-'36, p. 337 at p. 345

71
SUPERSTITION *V.* FAITH
I

The Bard of Santiniketan is Gurudev for me as he is for the inmates of that great institution. I and mine had found our shelter there when we returned from our long self-imposed exile in South Africa. But Gurudev and I early discovered certain differences of outlook between us. Our mutual affection has, however, never suffered by reason of our differences, and it cannot suffer by Gurudev's latest utterance on my linking the Bihar calamity with the sin of untouchability.* He had a

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*(The following is the statement issued by Dr. Rabindranath Tagore referred to in the article. -Ed.)

"It has caused me painful surprise to find Mahatma Gandhi accusing those who blindly follow their own social custom of untouchability of having brought down God's vengeance upon certain parts of Bihar, evidently specially selected for His desolating displeasure. It is all the more unfortunate, because this kind of unscientific view of things is too readily accepted by a large section of our countrymen. I keenly feel the indignity of it when I am compelled to utter a truism in asserting that physical catastrophes have their inevitable and exclusive origin in certain combination of physical facts. Unless we believe in inexorableness of the universal law in the working of which God Himself never interferes, we find it impossible to justify His ways on occasions like the one which has sorely stricken us in an overwhelming manner and scale.

If we associate ethical principles with cosmic phenomena, we shall have to admit that human nature is morally superior to Providence that preaches its lessons in good behaviour in orgies of the worst behaviour possible. For, we can never imagine any civilized ruler of men making indiscriminate examples of casual victims, including children and members of the untouchable community, in order to impress others dwelling at a safe distance who possibly deserve severer condemnation. Though we cannot point out any period of human history that is free from iniquities of the darkest kind, we still find citadels of malevolence yet remain unshaken, that the factories, that cruelly thrive upon abject poverty and the ignorance of the

perfect right to utter his protest when he believed that I was in error. My profound regard for him would make me listen to him more readily than to any other critic. But in spite of my having read the statement three times, I adhere to what I have written in these columns.

When at Tinnevelly I first linked the event with untouchability, I spoke with the greatest deliberation and out of the fulness of my heart. I spoke as I believed. I have long believed that physical phenomena produce results both physical and spiritual. The converse I hold to be equally true.

To me the earthquake was no caprice of God nor a result of a meeting of mere blind forces. We do not know all the laws of God nor their working. Knowledge of the tallest scientist or the greatest spiritualist is like a particle of dust. If God is not a personal being for me like my earthly father, He is infinitely more. He rules me in the tiniest detail of my life. I

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famished cultivators, or prison-houses in all parts of the world where a penal system is pursued, which most often, is a special form of licensed criminality, still stand firm. It only shows that the law of gravitation does not in the least respond to the stupendous load of callousness that accumulates till the moral foundation of our society begins to show dangerous cracks and civilizations are undermined. What is truly tragic about it is the fact that the kind of argument that Mahatmaji used by exploiting an event of cosmic disturbance far better suits the psychology of his opponents than his own, and it would not have surprised me at all if they had taken this opportunity of holding him and his followers responsible for the visitation of Divine anger. As for us, we feel prefectly secure in the faith that our own sins and errors, however enormous, have not enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins. We can depend upon it, sinners and saints, bigots and breakers of conventions. We who are immensely grateful to Mahatmaji for inducing by his wonder-working inspiration, freedom from fear and feebleness in the minds of his countrymen, feel profoundly hurt when any words from his mouth may emphasize the elements of unreason in those very minds — unreason, which is a fundamental source of all the blind powers that drive us against freedom and self-respect."

believe literally that not a leaf moves but by His will. Every breath I take depends upon His sufferance.

He and His Law are one. The Law is God. Anything attributed to Him is not a mere attribute. He is the Attribute. He is Truth, Love, Law and a million things that human ingenuity can name. I do believe with Gurudev 'in the inexorableness of the universal law in the working of which God Himself never interferes'. For God is the Law. But I submit that we do not know the Law or the laws fully, and what appear to us as catastrophes are so only because we do not know the universal law sufficiently.

Visitations like droughts, floods, earthquakes and the like, though they seem to have only physical origins, are, for me, somehow connected with man's morals. Therefore, I instinctively felt that the earthquake was a visitation for the sin of untouchability. Of course, Sanatanists have a perfect right to say that it was due to my crime of preaching against untouchability. My belief is a call to repentance and self-purification. I admit my utter ignorance of the working of the laws of Nature. But even as I cannot help believing in God though I am unable to prove His existence to the sceptics, in like manner, I cannot prove the connection of the sin of untouchability with the Bihar visitation even though the connection is instinctively felt by me. If my belief turns out to be ill-founded, it will still have done good to me and those who believe with me. For we shall have been spurred to more vigorous efforts towards self-purification, assuming, of course, that untouchability is a deadly sin. I know fully well the danger of such speculation. But I would be untruthful and cowardly if, for fear of ridicule, when those that are nearest and dearest to me are suffering, I did not proclaim my belief from the house-top. The physical effect of the earthquake will be soon forgotten and even partially repaired. But it would be terrible, if it is an expression of the divine wrath for the sin of untouchability and we did not learn the moral lesson from the event and repent of that sin. I have not the faith which Gurudev has that 'our own sins and errors, however enormous,

have not got enough force to drag down the structure of creation to ruins'. On the contrary, I have the faith that our own sins have more force to ruin the structure than any mere physical phenomenon. There is an indissoluble marriage between matter and spirit. Our ignorance of the results of the union makes it a profound mystery and inspires awe in us, but it cannot undo them. But a living recognition of the union has enabled many to use every physical catastrophe for their own moral uplifting.

With me the connection between cosmic phenomena and human behaviour is a living faith that draws me nearer to my God, humbles me and makes me readier for facing Him. Such a belief would be a degrading superstition, if out of the depth of my ignorance I used it for castigating my opponents.

Harijan, 16-2-'34, p. 4

II

(Originally appeared under the title "Let Us Pray")

When a man is down, he prays to God to lift him up. He is the Help of the helpless, says a Tamil proverb. The appalling disaster in Quetta paralyses one. It baffles all attempt at reconstruction. The whole truth about the disaster will perhaps never be known. The dead cannot be recalled to life.

Human effort must be there always. Those who are left behind must have help. Such reconstruction as is possible will no doubt be undertaken. All this and much more along the same line can never be a substitute for prayer.

But why pray at all? Does not God, if there be One, know what has happened? Does He stand in need of prayer to enable Him to do His duty?

No, God needs no reminder. He is within everyone. Nothing happens without His permission. Our prayer is a heart search. It is a reminder to ourselves that we are helpless without His support. No effort is complete without prayer, — without a definite recognition that the best human endeavour is of no effect if it had not God's blessing behind it. Prayer is a call to humility. It is a call to self-purification, to inward search.

I must repeat what I said at the time of the Bihar disaster. There is a divine purpose behind every physical calamity. That perfected science will one day be able to tell us beforehand when earthquakes will occur, as it tells us today of eclipses, is quite possible. It will be another triumph of the human mind. But such triumphs even indefinitely multiplied can bring about no purification of self without which nothing is of any value.

Of course we will forget this latest calamity as we have forgotten the Bihar one. I ask those who appreciate the necessity of inward purification to join in the prayer that we may read the purpose of God behind such visitations, that they may humble us and prepare us to face our Maker whevever the call comes, and that we may be ever ready to share the sufferings of our fellows whoever they may be.

Harijan, 8-6-'35, p. 132

III

(Originally appeared under the title "Implications of Prayer")

The few lines that I wrote inviting the people to prayer and repentance on the Quetta disaster have given rise to some private correspondence. One of the correspondents asks : "At the time of the Bihar 'quake you had no hesitation in saying that it was to be taken by Savarna Hindus as a fit punishment for the sin of untouchability. For what sin must the more terrible 'quake of Quttta be?" The writer had the right to put the question. What I said about Bihar was deliberately said even as the lines on Quetta were deliberately written. This call to prayer is a definite yearning of the soul. Prayer is a sign of repentance, a desire to become better, purer. A man of prayer regards what are known as physical calamities as divine chastisement. It is a chastisement alike for individuals and for nations. All chastisements do not equally startle people. Some affect only individuals, some others affect groups or nations only mildly. Disasters like Quetta stun us. Familiarity with ordinary everyday calamities breeds contempt for them. If earthquakes were a daily occurrence, we would take no notice of them. Even this Quetta one has not caused in us the same disturbance that the Bihar one did.

But it is the universal experience that every calamity brings a sensible man down on his knees. He thinks that it is God's answer to his sins and that he must henceforth behave better. His sins have left him hopelessly weak, and in his weakness he cries out to God for help. Thus have millions of human beings used their personal calamities for self-improvement. Nations have been known to invoke the assistance of God when calamities have overtaken them. They have abased themselves before God and appointed days of humiliation, prayer and purification.

I have suggested nothing new or original. In these days of fashionable disbelief, it does need some courage to call men and women to repentance. But I can claim no credit for courage. For my weaknesses or idiosyncrasies are well known. If I had known Quetta, as I know Bihar and Biharis, I would certainly have mentioned the sins of Quetta, though they might be no more its specialities than untouchability was Bihar's. But we all — the rulers and the ruled — know that we have many sins personal and national to answer for. The call is to all these to repentance, prayer and humiliation. True prayer is not a prelude to inaction. It is a spur to ceaseless, selfless action. Purification is never for the selfishly idle, it accrues only to the selflessly industrious.

Harijan, 15-6-'35, p. 140

72

FAITH *V.* REASON

An M.B.B.S. from Mandalay sends a string of questions of which the first is:

> "You once expressed your opinion in the pages of *Young India* that faith begins where reason ends. Then I expect you will call it faith, if a person believes in a thing for which he can give no reasons. Is it not then clear that faith is believing unreasonably? Do you think it is truth or justice if anybody believed in anything unreasonable? I think it is folly to believe in that way. I do not know what your barrister mind will call it. If you think like me I hope you will call faith as nothing but folly."

If the worthy doctor will excuse my saying so, there is in his question a clear failure to understand my meaning. That which is beyond reason is surely not unreasonable. Unreasonable belief is blind faith and is often superstition. To ask anybody to believe without proof what is capable of proof would be unreasonable, as for instance asking an intelligent person to believe without proof that the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to two right angles. But, for an experienced person to ask another to believe without being able to prove that there is God is humbly to confess his limitations and to ask another to accept in faith the statement of his experience. It is merely a question of that person's credibility. In ordinary matters of life we accept in faith the word of persons on whom we choose to rely although we are often cheated. Why may we not then in matters of life and death accept the testimony of sages all the world over that there is God and that He is to be seen by following Truth and Innocence (non-violence)? It is at least as reasonable for me to ask my correspondent to have that faith in this universal testimony as it would be for him to ask me to take his medicine in faith even though many a medicine-man might have failed me. I make bold to say that wihout faith this world would come to naught in a moment. True faith is appropriation of the reasoned experience of people whom we believe to have lived a life purified by prayer and penance. Belief, therefore, in prophets or incarnations who have lived in remote ages is not an idle superstition but a satisfaction of an inmost spiritual want. The formula, therefore, I have humbly suggested for guidance is rejection of every demand for faith where a matter is capable of present proof and unquestioned acceptance on faith of that which is itself incapable of proof except through personal experience.

The correspondent's next question is:

> "In *Young India* for December 9, 1926, there appeared a press-cutting that one Doctor Harold Blazer who chloroformed his daughter because he felt that his own end was near and there was no one to care for her when he was gone was fully acquitted. Dr. Blazer's Counsel, Mr. Howry declared : 'Blazer

did a right and moral thing by keeping the poor girl from becoming a charge on others.' To this you expressed your opinion that Dr. Blazer was wrong in taking the life of his daughter because it betrayed want of faith in the humanity of those round him and that there was no warrant for him to suppose that the daughter would not have been cared for by others. I would say that in expressing your opinion you have not pleaded like a pleader. I would request you to think over it again, for I think this is not an ordinary matter. For it is evident that you have got no scruples to put a useless burden on society simply because you have got enough faith in the society to shoulder the burden. For God's sake please excuse us from believing in that useless, nay, extremely harmful faith. Such a faith of your, I sincerely believe, is very harmful to the best interests of India. Please see what did Dr. Blazer's Counsel plead. He declared that Dr. Blazer did a right and moral thing by preventing the poor useless girl from becoming a burden on the society. The question whether the society would have cared for the child or not is beside the point. I would ask you one question : If after many more years of faithful service of India, you become blind, dumb and deaf, etc., or in other words become absolutely useless to society, will you like the society to feed you because you have got still life left in you or because you served so well? I do not know what curious ideas you have got about Ahimsa but my answer is quite clear. If I were quite useless for society even after many years of service, I should like to be killed rather than become a burden on society, for I reasonably believe that I shall be benefiting the society by being killed, thus removing the burden upon the society which I love. That it is the duty of society to care for all useful human beings and animals is quite a different thing."

I do believe that whilst the Jury was right in acquitting Dr. Blazer, considered from the strictly moral point of view, Dr. Blazer was wrong. My correspondent in his utilitarian zeal has overlooked the frightful consequences and implications of the doctrine he lays down. Indeed, his doctrine would belie his

own profession. What would he say if a young practitioner chloroformed to death a patient, whom he, the junior practitioner, considered to be incurable and therefore a useless burden to society and whom another, as a senior, subsequently found to be a case quite capable of cure? Is it not the boast of medical science to treat no case as finally incurable? As for myself, well, I do expect my countrymen to support me when I become a useless and burdensome article, assuming, of course, that I shall still want to live. What is more, I have full faith in my countrymen supporting me if that event comes to pass. I wonder if my correspondent will have all the lepers, the blind, the deaf, on fine night to be chloroformed to sweet everlasting sleep. And yet Damien was a leper and Milton was a blind poet. Man is not all body but he is something infinitely higher.

The correspondent's third question is :

> "In the same article, i.e. 'The Greatest Good of All' you wrote that a votary of Ahimsa cannot subscribe to the utilitarian formula. He will strive for the greatest good of all and die in the attempt to realize the ideal. He will therefore be willling to die so that the others may live. May I conclude then that you will prefer to be bitten by a poisonous snake and die rather than kill the same in trying to save yourself? If I am right in my conclusion, I think that in allowing yourself to be bitten by the snake rather than kill it, you will be committing the greatest sin I can ever think of. In that way you will be doing greatest possible harm to India by trying to save a harmful living creature and by dying willingly in trying to realize the ideal of your so-called greatest good of all. Is it not clear to you now? Will you not change your opinion now about benefiting all? I fear you will harm India in trying to benefit the whole world. You admit that you are an imperfect mortal. So it is impossible for you to benefit the whole world. It is even impossible for you to benefit the whole of India in all possible ways. Therefore it is quite reasonable to be contented with the greatest good of the greatest number, rather than pretend to do the greatest good to all without exception, — the good and the wicked, the useful and the useless, man, animal, etc., etc."

This is a question I would fain avoid answering not because of want of faith but because of want of courage. But I must not conceal my faith even though I may not have the courage to act up to it when it is put on its trial. Here then is my answer. I do not want to live at the cost of the life even of a snake. I should let him bite me to death rather than kill him. But it is likely that, if God puts me to that cruel test and permits a snake to assault me, I may not have the courage to die, but the beast in me may assert itself and I may seek to kill the snake in defending this perishable body. I admit that my belief has not yet become so incarnate in me as to warrant my stating emphatically that, I have shed all fear of snakes so as to befriend them as I would like to be able to. It is my implicit belief that snakes, tigers, etc. are God's answer to the poisonous, wicked, evil thoughts that we harbour. Anna Kingsford saw in the streets of Paris tigers in men already taking shape. I believe that all life is one. Thoughts take definite forms. Tigers and snakes have kinship with us. They are a warning to us to avoid harbouring evil, wicked, lustful thoughts. If I want to rid the earth of venomous beasts and reptiles, I must rid myself of all venomous thoughts. I shall not do so if in my impatient ignorance and in my desire to prolong the existence of the body I seek to kill the so-called venomous beasts and reptiles. If in not seeking to defend myself against such noxious animals I die, I should die to rise again a better and a fuller man. With that faith in me how should I seek to kill a fellow-being in a snake? But this is philosophy. Let me pray and let my readers join in the prayer to God that He may give me the strength to live up to that philosophy. For philosophy without life corresponding is like a body without life.

I know that in this land of ours we have enough philosophy and but little life. But I know also that the laws governing the conduct of man have still to be explored and the condition of exploration is imperative and unalterable. We shall explore them only by dying, never by killing. We must become living embodiments of Truth and Love, for God is Truth and Love.

Young India, 14-4-'27, p. 120

73

DOWN WITH SUPERNATURALISM

(The correspondence between Gandhiji and a reader of *Young India* on the above subject is reproduced below.)

To

The Editor,

Young India

Sir,

When you judge the action of a 'believer' like Aurangzeb in desecrating and demolishing a place of worship like the Kashi temple as 'belying' his 'belief', viz., Islam (in *Young India* of 4-11-1926), are you not presuming to know more of Islam than the Prophet of Islam himself? For you must know that Mahomed himself, the beau-ideal of Aurangzeb, when he entered Mecca in triumph against his enemies, destroyed all the objects and places of 'idolatrous' worship in that city, leaving a few of them like the Kaaba stone which he himself believed in! So then you must either (i) say that Mahomed was of those 'so-called believers who believed in their belief ' — which will not be in keeping with your former dictum that the great religious teachers of mankind were men who had exhibited the image of God in their own persons (Vide *Young India,* 8-7-1926, page 244, column 2) or (ii) allegorize away the iconoclastic career of the Arabian Prophet (May peace be on Him!) as you usually do with whatever in the scriptures of any sect taken literally you do not 'understand' or whatever in them similarly understood does not 'appeal to your reason', or (iii) repudiate the universally received life story of Mahomed as spurious. If there is a fourth way, please point it out; but please remember that Aurangzeb has been styled a 'living saint' *(Zinda Pir etc.)* by all Sunni divines and historians who have never a word to say against his temple destruction, so far as I know, but many of whom on the contrary have glorified him therefor.

Is this fact not remarkable, seeing how the Ulema of India are today divided on the subject of the desecrations, the demolitions and massacres which Ibn Saud, the Wahabi, has

been responsible for in Mecca, Medina and Taif, one section (the Ahle hadis) justifying those deeds as quite Islamic, and the others (Shias, Hanafis etc.) declaring them as un-Islamic? But I have yet to meet a member of that learned and pious fraternity who will wholeheartedly condemn Aurangzeb's high-handedness on the Hindus' holiest of the holies. It is much like those Sanatanis who would lynch you for trying to do away with untouchability in India and at the same time lynch also, if they could, those white-coloured folk in South Africa who are maintaining untouchability with the Indians there.

I am thus led to think that conflict and inconsistency are in the nature of all non-rational faiths of supernatural pretensions. Hence, however much you try to 'liberalize' such religions, you will never have truly liberalized them before you have improved them out of existence altogether. To amend them is to end them, and one can only liberalize them *away* : that is my opinion in which, the more I think, the more I am confirmed.

Prince Yudhishthira seems to have glimpsed the truth when he answered the Yaksha in this wise :

श्रुतिर्विभिन्ना स्मृतयश्च भिन्नाः ।
नैको मुनिर्यस्य वचः प्रमाणम् ॥
धर्मस्य तत्त्वं निहितं गुहायाम् ॥

So in the cave where it lives we will do best to leave it!

Yours etc.,

A Seeker after Truth

The reader will be glad to have this beautiful letter. The writer's hit at me is quite delicious. But I do not propose to adopt any of the three courses he thinks I usually take for defending the indefensible. There is so far as I know nothing in common between the Prophet's destruction of idols in Mecca and the reputed destruction by Aurangzeb. And should it turn out that the prophet had erred on occasions, his error would but prove his fallible nature without in any way diminishing his glory as an inspired seer exhibiting on most occasions the image of God. He never himself claimed infallibility. On the contrary he often consulted his companions

and when he was once told by Omer that he need not consult anybody as he had direct dealings with God, it is recorded that he retorted that if he had on that occasion a message from God, he would not have consulted Omer. I know that 'A Seeker after Truth' does not seriously mean that I 'allegorize away', without good cause whatever is inconvenient. I hope that his banter is meant merely to 'draw me'. Whatever the cause, I assure him and all concerned that whenever I regard any narrative as an allegory, I have substantial and intrinsic evidence for my belief. Nor do I repudiate without sufficient cause anything as spurious or apocryphal. As a fellow seeker after Truth I hope I have courage enough to own my errors and limitations. There are things in all religious books which baffle me. I hope some day to have them made clear to me. Till then, I cultivate humility, patience to wait. Man need not know all.

The most serious part however of the writer's letter is his repudiation of the supernatural. I suggest to him that rationalists have as many conundrums and inconsistencies to account for as supernaturalists. Is the uniform testimony of some of the purest and the noblest men so much humbug and hallucination when they say that according not to their belief, but experience, there is something beyond the senses? Is it not an arrogant claim to lay down the law that there is nothing beyond the five senses? Who does not *feel* that there are mysteries impenetrable by reason? Do not the daily and so-called sudden transformations of the character of those who worship in faith incontestably show that there are things that reason cannot understand or explain? The celebrated verse quoted by the writer after all presents the difficulty of knowing Dharma except through the heart. And after all the author of the great book from which the verse has been taken was himself a believer in the supernatural. The mystery of creation and death is itself a living demonstration of the supernatural. It will be time enough to scoff at it when man has by his reason succeeded in creating life.

Young India, 9-12-'26, p. 436

74
THE SUPREME ARBITER

(Originally appeared in the columns of "Notes")

In answer to the blind adherence, one often sees, given to everything written in Sanskrit verse and going under the name of Shastra, Sjt. S. D. Nadkarni sends me the following verses taken from sources universally regarded as authoritative and supporting the final authority of reason:

अपि पौरुषमादेवं शास्त्रं चेद्युक्तिबोधकम् ।
अन्यत्त्वार्षमपि त्याज्यं भाव्यं न्याय्यैकसेबिनाम् ॥
युक्तियुक्तभुपादेयं वचनं बालकादपि ।
अन्यत्तृणमिव त्याज्यमप्युक्तं पद्यजन्मना ॥

(A Shastra, though man-made, should be accepted, if it appeals to reason; and the contrary one rejected, though claiming to be inspired. We should be guided by our sense of the just alone. A saying sound in reason should be accepted, though it proceed from a child; and the contrary one rejected as a straw, though it purport to proceed from the god Brahma.)

— From *Yogavasistha* (Nyaya-Prakaranam)

समयश्चापि साधूनां प्रमाणं वेदवद् भवेत् ।

(A convention adopted by the good shall be as good as an authority as the Veda.)

— From the *Madhava-Smriti* (otherwise called the *Madhaviya Vyakhya)*

The verses show that the Shastras were never intended to supplant reason but to supplement it and never could be pleaded in defence of injustice or untruth.

Young India, 8-3-'28, p. 75

75
REASON *V.* AUTHORITY

A correspondent has sent me the September number of *Prabuddha Bharat* in which the editor has answered my endeavour to reply to his recent articles on the cult of Charkha and Khadi. If that answer has satisfied the editor and satisfied the reader, I cannot carry my own arguments any further, and must leave the final answer to time and experience. But one thing in the editorial reply deserves notice. The editor questions the propriety of my remark, that 'the inferential invocation of the authority of the illustrious dead in a reasoned discussion should be regarded as a sacrilege'. The editor resents this, more specially because *Prabuddha Bharat* is an organ of Swami Vivekananda's Order. I must however adhere to my statement. I think that the duty of avoiding in a reasoned discussion inferences from the writings of the founder of an Order devolves more specifically upon its members and its organ, for to sceptics the authority of the founder will be of no avail, even as the authority of Shri Krishna is of no use to one who is not his follower. And experience has shown, that in every case where there is an appeal to reason, any inference drawn from the writings of a great person, however illustrious he may be, is irrelevant and calculated to confuse the issues at stake. I would like the editor and the reader to note also that I have not criticized the citing of the specific writings of great men, but I have suggested the impropriety of drawing deductions from his writings instead of leaving the reader to draw his own from such writings. Thus, for instance, have not the so-called Christians distorted the undiluted message of Jesus? Have not sceptics drawn opposite deductions from the identical saying of Jesus? Similarly have not different Vaishnavite sections drawn different and often opposite deductions from the same texts in the Bhagavadgita, and is not the Bhagavadgita today quoted in support even of assassination? To me it is as plain as a pike staff, that where there is an appeal to reason pure and undefiled, there should be no appeal to authority however great

it may be. Curiously the correspondent who has sent me the *Prabuddha Bharat* has also sent me two apposite quotations from Sister Nivedita's writings. Here they are:

> "Like others, he (Vivekananda) had accepted without thought the assumption that machinery would be a boon to agriculture, but he could now see that while the American farmer, with his several square miles to farm, might be the better for machines, they were likely to do little but harm on the tiny farmlands of the Indian peasantry. The problem was quite different in the two cases. Of that alone he was firmly convinced. In everything including the problem of distribution, he listened with suspicion to all arguments that would work for the elimination of small interests, appearing in this as in so many other things as the perfect, though unconscious, expression of the spirit of the old Indian civilization."
>
> *(Master as I Saw Him,* p. 231)
>
> "His (Vivekananda's) American disciples were already familiar with his picture — that called to his own face a dreamy delight, — of the Punjabi maiden at her spinning wheel listening to its *'Shivoham Shivoham'."* (Ibid, p. 95)

Whether these extracts correctly represent the master or not is more than I can say.

Young India, 26-9-'29, p. 361

76
BLIND WORSHIP OF AUTHORITY

(Originally appeared under the title "Vegetarianism")

A correspondent is born in a meat-eating family. He has successfully resisted the pressure from his parents to return to the flesh-pot. "But," he says, "in a book I have before me, I read the opinion of Swami Vivekananda on the subject and feel a good deal shaken in my belief. The Swami holds that for Indians in their present state, flesh-diet is a necessity and he advises his friends to eat flesh freely. He even goes so far as to say 'if you incur any sin thereby throw it upon me; I will bear it.' I am now in a fix whether to eat flesh or not."

This blind worship of authority is a sign of weakness of mind. If the correspondent has such a deep-seated conviction that flesh-eating is not right, why should he be moved by the opinion to the contrary of the whole world? One needs to be slow to form convictions, but once formed, they must be defended against the heaviest odds.

As for the opinion of the great Swami, I have not seen the actual writing but I fear the correspondent has correctly quoted him. My opinion is well known. I do not regard flesh-food as necessary for us at any stage and under any clime in which it is possible for human beings ordinarily to live. I hold flesh-food to be unsuited to our species. We err in copying the lower animal world if we are superior to it. Experience teaches that animal food is unsuited to those who would curb their passions.

But it is wrong to over-estimate the importance of food in the formation of character or in subjugating the flesh. Diet is a powerful factor not to be neglected. But to sum up all religion in terms of diet, as it often done in India, is as wrong as it is to disregard all restraint in regard to diet and to give full reins to one's appetite. Vegetarianism is one of the priceless gifts of Hinduism. It may not be lightly given up. It is necessary therefore to correct the error that vegetarianism has made us weak in mind or body or passive or inert in action. The greatest Hindu reformers have been the activest in their generation and they have invariably been vegetarians. Who could show greater activity than say Shankar or Dayanand in their times?

But my correspondent must not accept me as his authority. The choice of one's diet is not a thing to be based on faith. It is a matter for every one to reason out for himself. There has grown up especially in the West an amount of literature on vegetarianism which any seeker after truth may study with profit. Many eminent medical men have contributed to its literature. Here, in India, we have not needed any encouragement for vegetarianism. For it has been hitherto accepted as the most desirable and the most respectable thing. Those however who, like the correspondent, feel shaken, may study the growing movement towards vegetarianism in the West.

Young India, 7-10-"26, p. 347

77
WHEN AUTHORITY SUPPLANTS REASON

(An extract from an article published under the title "The Caste System" is reproduced hereinbelow.)

I consider untouchability to be a heinous crime against humanity. It is not a sign of self-restraint but an arrogant assumption of superiority. It has served no useful purpose and it has suppressed, as nothing else in Hinduism has, vast numbers of the human race who are not only every bit as good as ourselves, but are rendering in many walks of life an essential service to the country. It is a sin of which the sooner Hinduism purges itself the better it is for itself, if it is to be recognized as an honourable and elevating religion. I know no argument in favour of its retention and I have no hesitation in rejecting scriptural authority of a doubtful character in order to support a sinful institution. Indeed I would reject all scriptural authority if it is in conflict with sober reason or the dictates of the heart. Authority sustains and ennobles the weak when it is the hand-work of reason, but it degrades them when it supplants reason sanctified by the still small voice within.

Young India, 8-12-'20, p. 3

78
WHEN FAITH BECOMES BLIND

My reason follows my heart. Without the latter it would go astray. Faith is the function of the heart. It must be reinforced by reason. The two are not antagonistic as some think. The more intense one's faith is, the more it whets one's reason.... I have not put my reason in cold storage. I listen carefully to all adverse criticism with an open and receptive mind, extract from it what is worth extracting and reject the chaff. I am always ready to correct my mistakes. A full and candid admission of one's mistake should make one proof against its repetition. A full realization of one's mistake is also the highest form of expiation. I would like all co-workers to

test with their reason all I say. When faith becomes blind it dies.

Harijan, 6-4-'40, p. 79

79
IMITATION

(From "Notes")

Q.: You have averred that a person who gives up eating meat in mere imitation of you cannot be said to be doing the right thing. Are you not wrong in holding this view?

A.: I see nothing wrong in what I have said. If a person may change his practice in imitation, it is equally possible for him to revert to the original practice in imitation. The gist of what I said was that nothing should be done without being well weighed and thought out and without deep conviction. Thoughtless imitation is the sport of little minds and may lead a man into a ditch with disastrous results.

Harijan, 30-6-'46, p. 205

80
ANCIENT WORD IF OPPOSED TO TRAINED REASON

(From "Message to Travancore")

Let us not deceive ourselves into the belief that everything that is written in Sanskrit and printed is Shastras and has any binding effect upon us. That which is opposed to the fundamental maxims of morality, that which is opposed to trained reason, cannot be claimed as Shastra no matter how ancient it may be.

Young India, 20-12-'27, p. 352

81
ARE SHASTRAS INFALLIBLE GUIDE ?

(The following conversation between a Pandit and Gandhiji is reproduced below from 'Weekly Letter' my M. D.)

"Should we not accept the Parasharasmriti as an in-infallible guide in Kaliyuga?" he asked.

"No," said Gandhiji, "I accept no authority or no Shastra as an infallible guide."

"But if you accept part of a Smriti, would you reject another part of it?"

"I reject the claim," said Gandhiji, without softening his stern attitude, "that we should accept the whole if we accept a part."

"Then would you accept what is convenient and reject what is inconvenient?"

"That's a good question. Hinduism is not a codified religion. I shall give you what I conceive to be Hinduism. We have in Hinduism hundreds and thousands of books whose names we do not even know, which go under the short name of Shastras. Now when we want to find out whether a thing is good or bad, I do not go to a particular book, but I look to the sum total of the effect of Hinduism. In Hinduism we have got an admirable foot-rule to measure every Shastra and every rule of conduct, and that is Truth. Whatever falls from Truth should be rejected, no matter wherever it comes from, and therefore the burden lies on the shoulders of that person who upholds a practice which is inconsistent with Truth, so that if a man wants to defend, for instance, untouchability, he has to show that it is consistent with Truth. Unless he shows that, all the authorities that he may cite in support of it are to me irrelevant."

Young India, 29-9-'27, p. 326

82

INTERPOLATIONS IN SMRITIS

(The following two questions and answers thereto are reproduced from an article which was published under the caption "Some Conundrums")

Q.: What have you to say to the verse in the Smritis on the marriage of a Brahman woman with a Shudra man?

A.: I do not regard as revelation the collection of verses printed under one cover as Smritis. I have no doubt that there are many interpolations in the Smritis and the other scriptural books. As I have said often enough in these columns, I reject as interpolations everything in the Smritis or other writings that is inconsistent with truth and non-violence or other fundamental and universal principles of ethics. There is abundant testimony in the ancient writings to show that such marriages were permitted.

Q.: You say there is no superiority or inferiority among the four *Varnas*. I believe in what you say, but is it consistent with many texts one can quote from the Shastras which clearly enunciate the opposite? See what the Smritis have to say of Shudras.

A.: This question is answered in the answer to the fourth (previous) question. The idea of superiority and inferiority is repugnant to the most elementary principles of morality. A Brahmana who considers himself superior to any single creature of God ceases to be a knower of Brahma. If we are children of the same God, how can there be any rank among us? The very first mention of *Varna* in the Vedas likens the four *Varnas* to the four main parts of the body. Is the head superior to the arms, the belly and the feet, or the feet superior to the other three? What will happen to the body, if these members began a quarrel about rank? The law of *Varna* is one of absolute equality among all the creatures of God. It is the basis of all the religions of the world. The verses in the Smritis about Shudras deserve to be summarily rejected as being contrary to the spirit of humanity.

Harijan, 28-9-'34, p. 257

83
GITA AND MANUSANHITA

(A certain Pandit wrote to Gandhiji a letter in which he raised several points. The remarks in the letter referring to Gita and Manusanhita and Gandhiji's reply thereto which appeared in an article published under the caption "A Sanatanist's Conclusions" are given below.)

> "You are reported to have said to the effect that Gita is the only scripture of unquestionable authority which alone should be our true guide in matters social, religious and spiritual. Such a view is untenable on the following grounds:
>
> (a) Gita is an excellent treatise on philosophy and theology, but it does not deal with social legislation.
>
> (b) Gita is only a small portion of a larger work, namely, the Mahabharata, and there is no reason why a particular portion, however good in itself, should be accepted to the exclusion of the rest.
>
> (c) Gita is a compendium of the subtlest philosophical thoughts and spiritual mysticism and as such its true purport is not intelligible to the laymen of the world. The religion of the Gita may be understood and practised only by a fortunate few, but it cannot be the basis of social discipline or popular theocracy.
>
> The sources of Hindu religion are enumerated in the first chapter of the Manusanhita. There is no valid reason for its rejection on the mere suspicion of interpolations."

The Pandit therefore conveyed to Gandhiji that he could not agree with the aforesaid view of Gandhiji which was said to be reported.

Gandhiji observed as follows :

"It would have been much better if the Pandit had quoted my very words about the Gita, as he would at once have seen the difference between what I am reported to have said and what I have actually written. This is what I wrote in my statement dated 4th November last :

> 'It is the one open book to every Hindu who will care to study it, and if all the other scriptures were

reduced to ashes, the seven hundred verses of this imperishable booklet are quite enough to tell one what Hinduism is and how one can live up to it. And I claim to be a Sanatanist because for forty years I have been seeking literally to live up to the teachings of that book. Whatever is contrary to its main theme I reject as un-Hindu. It excludes no faith and no teacher.'

"The Pandit and the reader will see that there is a very wide difference between what I have actually said and what is atttributed to me and, that being the case, the grounds for showing the untenability of a position I have never taken up become irrelevant.

"Similarly with reference to the Code of Manu, I never rejected the whole of it on 'the mere suspicion of interpolation'; and as to interpolations, they are more than a suspicion, for what I consider as interpolations are clearly in contravention of the fundamentals laid down in the Gita, and, for that matter, in Manu's Code itself. The following is Manu's touchstone of religion :

विद्वद्भिः सेवितः सद्भिर्नित्यमद्वेषरागिभिः ।
हृदयेनाभ्यनुज्ञातो यो धर्मस्तं निबोधत ॥

Manu, II-I

(Whatever is always followed by the learned, the good and those who are free from anger and attachment and whatever is experienced in the heart, know that to be religion.)

Another text is, again, from the same Code:

धृतिः क्षमादमोऽस्तेयं शौचमिन्द्रियनिग्रहः ।
धीर्विद्या सत्यमक्रोधो दशकं धर्मलक्षणम् ॥

(Steadfastness, forgiveness, restraint, non-stealing, purity, control of the senses, intelligence, learning, truth, freedom from anger, these are the touchstone of religion.)

Accordingly, whatever is clearly contrary to this touchstone must be rejected as an interpolation."

Harijan, 25-2-'33, p. 4

84
MANUSMRITI

(The following passage is taken from an article which originally appeared under the title "An Adi-Dravida's Difficulties".)

I hold Manusmriti as part of the Shastras. But that does not mean that I swear by every verse that is printed in the book described as Manusmriti. There are so many contradictions in the printed volume that, if you accept one part, you are bound to reject those parts that are wholly inconsistent with it. I hold Manusmriti as a religious book because of the lofty teachings contained in it. The verses quoted by the correspondent are flatly contradictory to the spirit of its main theme. The correspondent should know that nobody is in possession of the original text. In fact, there is no evidence to prove that a Rishi named Manu ever lived. Somehow or other, the genius of Hinduism has made the writers or the givers of the grandest truths efface themselves. Therefore I have suggested to seekers after Truth the only safe rule for their guidance in studying Shastras, namely, that they should reject whatever is contrary to Truth and Ahimsa, the true foundations of all religions.

Harijan, 6-4-'34, p. 60

85
HOW TO STUDY THE GITA

(The summary of Gandhiji's address to a Gita Class as given by M. D. in his "Weekly Letter" is reproduced below.)

I cannot conceive anything so fortifying as a reverent study of the Bhagavadgita, and if students will remember that they are to learn it not in order to parade their Sanskrit knowledge, or even their knowledge of the Gita, they will know that they learn it in order to derive spiritual comfort and to solve the moral difficulties that face them. No man who engages in a reverent study of that book can help becoming a

true servant of the nation and through it of humanity. The Gita contains the gospel of work, the gospel of Bhakti or Devotion and the gospel of Jnana or Knowledge. Life should be a harmonious whole of these three. But the gospel of service is the basis of all, and what can be more necessary for those who want to serve the country than that they begin with the chapter enunciating the gospel of work (third chapter)? But you must approach it with the five necessary equipments, viz. *ahimsa* (non-violence), *satya* (truth), *brahmacharya* (celibacy), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *asteya* (non-stealing). Then and then only will you be able to reach a correct interpretation of it. And then you will read it to discover in it Ahimsa and not *himsa,* as so many nowadays try to do. Read it with the necessary equipment and I assure you, you will have peace of which you were never aware before.

Young India, 3-11-'27, p. 369 at p. 371

SECTION FOUR : THE BHAGAVADGITA

86
GITA—THE MOTHER

Being asked during his recent visit to Banaras, by Acharya Anandshankar Dhruva to address a few words to students of the Kashi Vishvavidyalaya, on the Gita, Gandhiji in the course of a Hindi speech said :

"I have been asked by Acharya Anandshankar Dhruva to say a few words on the Gita to the students of the Kashi Vishvavidyalaya. It is not without hesitation that I have accepted the invitation. What right can a layman like myself have to discourse on a theme like this in the presence of a savant like him? I have neither his profound scholorship, nor the deep study of our ancient religious lore which Pandit Malaviyaji, for instance, has. Sardar Vallabhbhai, in his characteristic manner, asked me this morning whether scavengers, cultivators, and weavers like him and me were not altogether out of court in a city of pandits like Kashi and in the presence of such learned pandits as Malaviyaji and Acharya Dhruva, and in a way he was right. But I have come here, not with any pretence to learning, but only to tell you what reactions the Gita had on lay natures like mine and the Sardar's. I wonder whether you have even a distant idea of how profoundly it affected the Sardar during his imprisonment. I am here to bear witness to the fact that in the Yeravda prison it gave him more strength and sustenance than meat and drink. To read the Gita in the original he set about learning Sanskrit with the help of Pandit Satavalekar's Sanskrit self-instructor, and once he had started on it, the book seldom left his hands. It occupied him from morning till night. It was not an obsession of an unoccupied mind, as you might be tempted to think, but the result of deep thought. 'Which is the one book that can be to the Hindus what the Bible is to the Christians or the Koran to the Musalmans?' we asked ourselves. Is it the Vedas? No.

The Bhagavat? No. Devipuran! No. Early in my childhood I had felt the need of a scripture that would serve me as an unfailing guide through the trials and temptations of life. The Vedas could not supply that need, if only because to learn them would require fifteen to sixteen years of hard study at a place like Kashi, for which I was not ready then. But the Gita, I had read somewhere, gave within the compass of its 700 verses the quintessence of all the Shastras and the Upanishads. That decided me. I learnt Sanskrit to enable me to read the Gita. Today the Gita is not only my Bible or my Koran; it is more than that — it is my mother. I lost my earthly mother who gave me birth long ago; but this eternal mother has completely filled her place by my side ever since. She has never changed, she has never failed me. When I am in difficulty or distress, I seek refuge in her bosom. Often in the course of my struggle against untouchability, I am confronted with conflicting opinions delivered by doctors of learning. Some of them tell me that untouchability as it is practised today has no sanction in Hinduism and they bless my efforts to eradicate it; but there are some others who maintain that untouchability has been an essential part of Hinduism from the very beginning. Which authority should I follow under the circumstances? I feel absolutely at sea. The Vedas and the Smritis are of no avail to me. I then approach the Mother and say, 'Mother, these learned pandits have put me in a predicament. Help me out of my perplexity.' And the Mother, with a smile, says in reply : 'The assurance held out by me in the ninth chapter is not meant for the Brahmanas only, but for the sinner and the outcaste, the downtrodden and the disinherited, too.' But in order to be worthy of that promise, we must be obedient and devoted children of the Mother and not disobedient and disloyal children, who only make a pretence of devotion.

It is sometimes alleged against the Gita that it is too difficult a work for the man in the street. The criticism, I venture to submit, is ill-founded. The Gita enabled the late Lokmanya, out of his encyclopaedic learning and study, to produce a monumental commentary. For him it was a

storehouse of profound truths to exercise his intellect upon. But that need not scare away a lay reader. If you find all the eighteen chapters too difficult to negotiate, make a careful study of the first three chapters only. They will give you in a nutshell what is propounded in greater detail and from different angles in the remaining fifteen chapters. Even these three chapters can be further epitomized in a few verses that can be selected from these chapters. Add to this the fact that at three distinct places the Gita goes even further and exhorts to us to leave alone all 'isms' and take refuge in the Lord alone, and it will be seen how baseless is the charge that the message of the Gita is too subtle or complicated for lay minds to understand. The Gita is the universal Mother. She turns away nobody. Her door is wide open to any one who knocks. A true votary of the Gita does not know what disappointment is. He ever dwells in perennial joy and peace that passeth understanding. But that peace and joy come not to the sceptic or to him who is proud of his intellect or learning. It is reserved only for the humble in spirit who brings to her worship a fullness of faith and an undivided singleness of mind. There never was a man who worshipped her in that spirit and went back disappointed.

Our students are prone to be upset by trifles. A trivial thing like failure in an examination plunges them into the darkest despair. The Gita inculcates upon them the duty of perseverance in the face of seeming failure. It teaches us that we have a right to actions only but not to the fruit thereof and that success and failure are one and the same thing at bottom. It calls upon us to dedicate ourselves, body, mind and soul, to pure duty, and not to become mental voluptuaries at the mercy of all chance desires and undisciplined impulses. As a Satyagrahi, I can declare that the Gita is ever presenting me with fresh lessons. If somebody tells me that this is my delusion, my reply to him would be that I shall hug this delusion as my richest treasure.

I would advise the students to begin their day with an early morning recitation of the Gita. I am a lover and devotee of Tulasidas. I adore the great spirit that gave to an aching

world the all-healing *mantra* of Ramanama. But I am here today not to present Tulasidas to you, but to ask you to take up the study of the Gita, not in a carping or critical spirit, but in a devout and reverent spirit. Thus approached, she will grant your every wish. It is no joke, I admit, remembering by heart all the eighteen chapters, but it is worth-while to make the attempt. Once you have tasted of its sweet nectar, your attachment to it will grow from day to day. The recitation of the Gita verses will support you in your trials and console you in your distress, even in the darkness of solitary confinement. And, if with these verses on your lips you receive the final summons and deliver up your spirit, you will attain Brahma-Nirvan — the final Liberation. What that blessed state is — I leave it for your learned Acharyas to explain to you."

Harijan, 24-8-'34, p. 221

87
THE SECRET OF GITA

(Originally appeared under the title "Gita Jayanti")

Thus writes Shri G. V. Ketkar of *Kesari,* Poona :

"This year Gita Jayanti is on 22nd December, Friday. I repeat the request, which I have been making for some years, that you should write about the Gita and Gita Jayanti in *Harijan*. I also repeat another which was made last year. In one of your speeches on the Gita, you have said that for those who have no time to go through the whole of the Gita (700 verses) it is sufficient to read the second and third chapters. You have also said that these two chapters can be further epitomized. If possible you should explain why you regard the second and third chapters as fundamental. I have tried to place the same idea before the public by publishing the verses of the second and third chapters as *Gita Bija* or the essence of the Gita. Your writing on the subject will naturally be more effective."

I have hitherto resisted Shri Ketkar's request. I do not know that these Jayantis serve the purpose for which they are intended. Spiritual matters do not admit of the ordinary method of advertisement. The best advertisement of things spiritual is corresponding action. I believe that all spiritual compositions owe their effect, first to their being a faithful record of the experiences of their authors, and secondly because of the life lived by the devotees, as far as possible, in accordance with their teachings. Thus the composers breathe life into their compositions, and the votaries nurse them into robustness by living them. That, to my mind, is the secret of the hold of the Gita, Tulasidas's Ramayana and such other works on the millions. In yielding to Shri Ketkar's pressure, therefore, I entertain the hope that those who take part in the forthcoming celebration will approach it in the proper spirit and with a fixed intention to live up to the message of the noble song. I have endeavoured to show that its message consists in the performance of one's duty with detachment. The theme of the Gita is contained in the second chapter, and the way to carry out the message is to be found in the third chapter. This is not to say that the other chapters have less merit. Indeed, every one of them has a merit of its own. The Gita has been called *(Gitai)* by Vinoba who has translated it verse for verse in very simple yet stately Marathi. The metre corresponds with that of the original. To thousands it is *the* real mother, for it yields the rich milk of consolation in difficulties. I have called it my spiritual dictionary, for it has never failed me in distress. It is moreover a book which is free from sectarianism and dogma. Its appeal is universal. I do not regard the Gita as an abstruse book. No doubt learned men can see abstruseness in everything they come across. But in my opinion a man with ordinary intelligence should find no difficulty in gathering the simple message of the Gita. Its Sanskrit is incredibly simple. I have read many English translations, but there is nothing to equal Edwin Arnold's metrical translation which he has beautifully and aptly called *The Song Celestial.*

Harijan, 16-12-'39, p. 382

88
KRISHNA AND GITA

[The following is a summary of a speech delivered by Gandhiji at Arsikere in Mysore State:]

We do not know what Shri Krishna's life means for us, we do not read the *Gita,* we make no attempt to teach it to our children. The *Gita* is such a transcendental book that men of every creed, age and clime may read it with respect, and find in it the principles of their respective religions. If we thought of Krishna on every *Janmashtami* day and read the *Gita* and resolved to follow its teachings, we should not be in our present sorry plight. Shri Krishna served the people all his life, he was a real servant of the people. He could have led the hosts at Kurukshetra, but he preferred to be Arjuna's charioteer. His whole life was one unbroken *Gita* of *karma.* He refused proud Duryodhana's sweets and preferred humble Vidura's spinach. As a child he was a cowherd and we still know him by the name of Gopala. But we, his worshippers, have neglected the cow today, the Adi-Karnatakas slaughter cows and eat beef, and our infants and invalids have to go without cow's milk. Krishna knew no sleep or idleness. He kept sleepless vigil of the world, we his posterity have become indolent and forgotton the use of our hands. In the *Bhagavadgita* Lord Krishna has shown the path of *bhakti* — which means the path of *karma*. Lokamanya Tilak has shown that whether we desire to be *bhaktas* or *jnanis, karma* is the only way; but the *karma* should not be for self but for others. Action for one's own self binds, action for the sake of others delivers from bondage. What can be the altruistic action which can be universally done, by Hindus, Mussulmans, Christians, by men, women and children? I have tried to demonstrate that spinning alone is that sacrificial act, for that alone can make us do something in God's name, something for the poorest, something that can infuse activity in their idle limbs. Lord Krishna has also taught that to be a true *bhakta* we should make no difference between a *brahmana* and a scavenger. If that is true there can be no place for

untouchability in Hinduism. If you are still hugging that superstition you can cleanse yourself by getting rid of it on this the sacred day of Krishna's birth. He who swears by the *Gita* may know no distinction between Hindu and Mussulman, for Lord Krishna has declared that he who adores God in a true spirit by whatsoever name adores Him. The path of *bhakti, karma,* love as expounded in the *Gita,* leaves no room for the despising of man by man.

Young India, 1-9-'27

89
THE MESSAGE OF THE GITA

[It was at Kosani in Almora, that on 24th June 1929, i.e. after two years' waiting, that I finished the introduction in Gujarati to my translation of the Gita. The whole was then published in due course. It has been translated in Hindi, Bengali and Marathi. There has been an insistent demand for an English translation. I finished the translation of the introduction at the Yeravda prison. Since my discharge it has lain with friends, and now I give it to the reader. Those, who take no interest in the book of life, will forgive the trespass on these columns. To those who are interested in the poem and treat it as their guide, my humble attempt might prove of some help. — M.K.G.]

I

Just as, acted upon by the affection of co-workers like Swami Anand and others, I wrote my *Experiments with Truth,* so has it been regarding my rendering of the Gita. "We shall be able to appreciate your meaning of the message of the Gita, only when we are able to study a translation of the whole text by yourself, with the addition of such notes as you may deem necessary. I do not think it is just on your part to deduce Ahimsa, etc. from stray verses", thus spoke Swami Anand to me during the non-co-operation days. I felt the force of his

remarks. I therefore told him that I would adopt his suggestion when I got the time. Shortly afterwards I was imprisoned. During my incarceration I was able to study the Gita more fully. I went reverently through the Gujarati translation of the Lokmanya's great work. He had kindly presented me with the Marathi original and the translations in Gujarati and Hindi, and had asked me, if I could not tackle the original, at least to go through the Gujarati translation. I had not been able to follow the advice outside the prison walls. But when I was imprisoned I read the Gujarati translation. This reading whetted my appetite for more and I glanced through several works on the Gita.

2. My first acquaintance with the Gita began in 1888-89 with the verse translation by Sir Edwin Arnold known as *The Song Celestial.* On reading it I felt a keen desire to read a Gujarati translation. And I read as many translations as I could lay hold of. But all such reading can give me no passport for presenting my own translation. Then again my knowledge of Sanskrit is limited; my knowledge of Gujarati too is in no way scholarly. How could I then dare present the public with my translation?

3. It has been my endeavour as also that of some companions to reduce to practice the teaching of the Gita as I have understood it. The Gita has become for us a spiritual reference book. I am aware that we ever fail to act in perfect accord with the teaching. The failure is not due to want of effort, but is in spite of it. Even through the failures we seem to see rays of hope. The accompanying rendering contains the meaning of the Gita message which this little band is trying to enforce in its daily conduct.

4. Again this rendering is designed for women, the commercial class, the so-called Shudras and the like, who have little or no literary equipment, who have neither the time nor the desire to read the Gita in the original, and yet who stand in need of its support. In spite of my Gujarati being unscholarly, I must own to having the desire to leave to the Gujaratis, through the mother tongue, whatever knowledge I may possess.

I do indeed wish, that at a time when literary output of a questionable character is pouring in upon the Gujaratis, they should have before them a rendering the majority can understand of a book that is regarded as unrivalled for its spiritual merit and so withstand the overwhelming flood of unclean literature.

5. This desire does not mean any disrespect to the other renderings. They have their own place. But I am not aware of the claim made by the translators of enforcing their meaning of the Gita in their own lives. At the back of my reading there is the claim of an endeavour to enforce the meaning in my own conduct for an unbroken period of 40 years. For this reason I do indeed harbour the wish that all Gujarati men or women, wishing to shape their conduct according to their faith, should digest and derive strength from the translation here presented.

6. My co-workers, too, have worked at this translation. My knowledge of Sanskrit being very limited I should not have full confidence in my literal translation. To that extent therefore the translation has passed before the eyes of Vinoba, Kaka Kalelkar, Mahadev Desai and Kishorlal Mashruwala.

II

7. Now about the message of the Gita.

8. Even in 1888-89, when I first became acquainted with the Gita, I felt that it was not a historical work, but that under the guise of physical warfare, it described the duel that perpetually went on in the hearts of mankind, and that physical warfare was brought in merely to make the description of the internal duel more alluring. This preliminary intuition became more confirmed on a closer study of religion and the Gita. A study of the Mahabharata gave it added confirmation. I do not regard the Mahabharata as a historical work in the accepted sense. The *Adiparva* contains powerful evidence in support of my opinion. By ascribing to the chief actors superhuman or subhuman origins, the great Vyas made short work of the history of kings and their peoples. The persons therein described may be historical, but the author of the Mahabharata

has used them merely to drive home his religious theme.

9. The author of the Mahabharata has not established the necessity of physical warfare; on the contrary he has proved its futility. He has made the victors shed tears of sorrow and repentance, and has left them nothing but a legacy of miseries.

10. In this great work the Gita is the crown. Its second chapter, instead of teaching the rules of physical warfare, tells us how a perfected man is to be known. In the characteristics of the perfected man of the Gita, I do not see any to correspond to physical warfare. Its whole design is inconsistent with the rules of conduct governing the relations between warring parties.

11. Krishna of the Gita is perfection and right knowledge personified; but the picture is imaginary. That does not mean that Krishna, the adored of his people, never lived. But perfection is imagined. The idea of a perfect incarnation is an aftergrowth.

12. In Hinduism, incarnation is ascribed to one who has performed some extraordinary service of mankind. All embodied life is in reality an incarnation of God, but it is not usual to consider every living being an incarnation. Future generations pay this homage to one who, in his own generation, has been extraordinarily religious in his conduct. I can see nothing wrong in this procedure; it takes nothing from God's greatness, and there is no violence done to truth. There is an Urdu saying which means, "Adam is not God but he is a spark of the Divine." And therefore he who is the most religiously behaved has most of the divine spark in him. It is in accordance with this train of thought, that Krishna enjoys, in Hinduism, the status of the most perfect incarnation.

13. This belief in incarnation is a testimony of man's lofty spiritual ambition. Man is not at peace with himself till he has become like unto God. The endeavour to reach this state is the supreme, the only ambition worth having. And this is self-realization. This self-realization is the subject of the Gita, as it is of all scriptures. But its author surely did not write it to establish that doctrine. The object of the Gita appears to me to be that of showing the most excellent way to

attain self-realization. That, which is to be found, more or less clearly, spread out here and there in Hindu religious books, has been brought out in the clearest possible language in the Gita even at the risk of repetition.

14. *That matchless remedy is renunciation of fruits of action.*

15. This is the centre round which the Gita is woven. This renunciation is the central sun, round which devotion, knowledge and the rest revolve like planets. The body has been likened to a prison. There must be action where there is body. Not one embodied being is exempted from labour. And yet all religions proclaim that it is possible for man, by treating the body as the temple of God, to attain freedom. Every action is tainted, be it ever so trivial. How can the body be made the temple of God? In other words how can one be free from action, i.e. from the taint of sin? The Gita has answered the question in decisive language : "By desireless action; by renouncing fruits of action; by dedicating all activities to God, i.e. by surrendering oneself to Him body and soul."

16. But desirelessness or renunciation does not come for the mere talking about it. It is not attained by an intellectual feat. It is attainable only by a constant heart-churn. Right knowledge is necessary for attaining renunciation. Learned men possess a knowledge of a kind. They may recite the Vedas from memory, yet they may be steeped in self-indulgence. In order that knowledge may not run riot, the author of the Gita has insisted on devotion accompanying it and has given it the first place. Knowledge without devotion will be like a misfire. Therefore, says the Gita, "Have devotion, and knowledge will follow." This devotion is not mere lip worship, it is a wrestling with death. Hence the Gita's assessment of the devotee's qualities is similar to that of the sage's.

17. Thus the devotion required by the Gita is no soft-hearted effusiveness. It certainly is not blind faith. The devotion of the Gita had the least to do with externals. A devotee may use, if he likes, rosaries, forehead marks, make offerings, but these things are no test of his devotion. He is the devotee who

is jealous of none, who is a fount of mercy, who is without egotism, who is selfless, who treats alike cold and heat, happiness and misery, who is ever forgiving, who is always contented, whose resolutions are firm, who has dedicated mind and soul to God, who causes no dread, who is not afraid of others, who is free from exultation, sorrow and fear, who is pure, who is versed in action and yet remains unaffacted by it, who renounces all fruit, good or bad, who treats friend and foe alike, who is untouched by respect or disrespect, who is not puffed up by praise, who does not go under when people speak ill of him, who loves silence and solitude, who has disciplined reason. Such devotion is inconsistent with the existence at the same time of strong attachments.

18. We thus see, that to be a real devotee is to realize oneself. Self-realization is not something apart. One rupee can purchase for us poison or nectar, but knowledge or devotion cannot buy us either salvation or bondage. These are not media of exchange. They are themselves the thing we want. In other words if the means and the end are not identical, they are almost so. The extreme of means is salvation. Salvation of the Gita is perfect peace.

19. But such knowledge and devotion, to be true, have to stand the test of renunciation of fruits of action. Mere knowledge of right and wrong will not make one fit for salvation. According to common notions a mere learned man will pass as a pandit. He need not perform any service. He will regard it as bondage even to lift a little *lota.* Where one test of knowledge is non-liability for service, there is no room for such mundane work as the lifting a *lota.*

20. Or take Bhakti. The popular notion of Bhakti is soft-heartedness, telling beads and the like and disdaining to do even a loving service, lest the telling of beads, etc. might be interrupted. This Bhakta therefore leaves the rosary only for eating, drinking and the like, never for grinding corn or nursing patients.

21. But the Gita says : 'No one has attained his goal without action. Even men like Janaka attained salvation

through action. If even I were lazily to cease working, the world would perish. How much more necessary then for the people at large to engage in action?'

22. While on the one hand it is beyond dispute that all action binds, on the other hand it is equally true that all living beings have to do some work whether they will or no. Here all activity, whether mental or physical, is included in the term action. Then how is one to be free from the bondage of action, even though he may be acting? The manner in which the Gita has solved the problem is, to my knowledge, unique. The Gita says: "Do your allotted work but renounce its fruit — be detached and work — have no desire for reward and work."

This is the unmistakable teaching of the Gita. He who gives up action falls. He who gives up only the reward rises. But renunciation of fruit in no way means indifference to result. In regard to every action one must know the result that is expected to follow, the means thereto, and the capacity for it. He, who, being thus equipped, is without desire for the result, and is yet wholly engrossed in the due fulfilment of the task before him, is said to have renounced the fruits of his action.

23. Again, let no one consider renunciation to mean want of fruit for the renouncer. The Gita reading does not warrant such a meaning. Renunciation means absence of hankering after fruit. As a matter of fact, he who renounces reaps a thousandfold. The renunciation of the Gita is the acid test of faith. He who is ever brooding over result often loses nerve in the performance of his duty. He becomes impatient and then gives vent to anger and begins to do unworthy things, he jumps from action to action, never remaining faithful to any. He who broods over results is like a man given to objects of senses; he is ever distracted, he says goodbye to all scruples, everything is right in his estimation and he therefore resorts to means fair and foul to attain his end.

24. From the bitter experience of desire for fruit the author of the Gita discovered the path of renunciation of fruit, and put it before the world in a most convincing manner. The common belief is that religion is always opposed to material

good. "One cannot act religiously in mercantile and such other matters. There is no place for religions in such pursuits; religion is only for attainment of salvation," we hear many worldly-wise people say. In my opinion the author of the Gita has dispelled this delusion. He has drawn no line of demarcation between salvation and worldly pursuits. On the contrary he has shown that religion must rule even our worldly pursuits. I have felt that the Gita teaches us that what cannot be followed out in day-to-day practice cannot be called religion. Thus, according to the Gita, all acts that are incapable of being performed without attachment are taboo. This golden rule saves mankind from many a pitfall. According to this interpretation murder, lying, dissoluteness and the like must be regarded as sinful and therefore taboo. Man's life then becomes simple, and from that simpleness springs peace.

25. Thinking along these lines, I have felt that in trying to enforce in one's life the central teaching of the Gita, one is bound to follow truth and Ahimsa. When there is no desire for fruit, there is no temptation for untruth or Himsa. Take any instance of untruth or violence, and it will be found that at its back was the desire to attain the cherished end. But it may be freely admitted that the Gita was not written to establish Ahimsa. It was an accepted and primary duty even before the Gita age. The Gita had to deliver the message of renunciation of fruit. This is clearly brought out as early as the 2nd chapter.

26. But if the Gita believed in Ahimsa or it was included in desirelessness, why did the author take a warlike illustration? When the Gita was written, although people believed in Ahimsa, wars were not only not taboo, but nobody observed the contradiction between them and Ahimsa.

27. In assessing the implications of renunciation of fruit, we are not required to probe the mind of the author of the Gita as to his limitations of Ahimsa and the like. Because a poet puts a particular truth before the world, it does not necessarily follow that he has known or worked out all its great consequences, or that having done so, he is able always to express them fully. In this perhaps lies the greatness of the

poem and the poet. A poet's meaning is limitless. Like man, the meaning of great writings suffers evolution. On examining the history of languages, we notice that the meaning of important words has changed or expanded. This is true of the Gita. The author has himself extended the meanings of some of the current words. We are able to discover this even on a superficial examination. It is possible that in the age prior to that of the Gita, offering of animals in sacrifice was permissible. But there is not a trace of it in the sacrifice in the Gita sense. In the Gita continuous concentation on God is the king of sacrifices. The third chapter seems to show that sacrifice chiefly means body labour for service. The third and the fourth chapters read together will give us other meanings for sacrifice but never animal sacrifice. Similarly has the meaning of the word Sannyasa undergone, in the Gita, a transformation. The Sannyasa of the Gita will not tolerate complete cessation of all activity. The Sannyasa of the Gita is all work and yet no work. Thus the author of the Gita by extending meanings of words has taught us to imitate him. Let it be granted, that according to the letter of the Gita it is possible to say that warfare is consistent with renunciation of fruit. But after 40 years' unremitting endeavour fully to enforce the teaching of the Gita in my own life, I have, in all humility, felt that perfect renunciation is impossible without perfect observance of Ahimsa in every shape and form.

28. The Gita is not an aphoristic work; it is a great religious poem. The deeper you dive into it, the richer the meanings you get. It being meant for the people at large, there is pleasing repetition. With every age the important words will carry new and expanding meanings. But its central teaching will never vary. The seeker is at liberty to extract from this treasure any meaning he likes so as to enable him to enforce in his life the central teaching.

29. Nor is the Gita a collection of Do's and Don't's. What is lawful for one may be unlawful for another. What may be permissible at one time, or in one place, may not be so at another time, and in another place. Desire for fruit is the only

universal prohibition. Desirelessness is obligatory.

30. The Gita has sung the praises of knowledge, but it is beyond the mere intellect; it is essentially addressed to the heart and capable of being understood by the heart. Therefore the Gita is not for those who have no faith. The author makes Krishna say :

"Do not entrust this treasure to him who is without sacrifice, without devotion, without the desire for this teaching and who denies Me. On the other hand those who will give this precious treasure to My devotees will by the fact of this service assuredly reach Me. And those who being free from malice, will with faith absorb this teaching, shall, having attained freedom, live where people of true merit go after death."

Young India, 6-8-'31, p. 205

90
THE TEACHING OF GITA
I

Referring to my recent articles on the English peace movement led by Canon Sheppard, a friend writes :

> "I hold the view that independently of the context of the Gita and the preliminary conversation between Arjuna and Shri Krishna, Hinduism does not stand decisively for non-violence in regard to organised invasion. It would be straining too much to interpret all our best scriptures in this way. Hinduism no doubt holds the spirit of compassion and love as the very highest duty for man. But it does not preach what you or the pacifists preach, and it is no good straining everything into an allegory for this object."

I have admitted in my introduction to the Gita known as *Anasakti Yoga* that it is not a treatise on non-violence nor was it written to condemn war. Hinduism as it is practised today, or has even been known to have ever been practised, has certainly not condemned war as I do. What, however, I have done is to put a new but natural and logical interpretation upon the whole teaching of the Gita and the spirit of Hinduism. Hinduism, not to speak of other religions, is ever evolving. It has no one scripture like the Koran or the Bible. Its scriptures are also

evolving and suffering addition. The Gita itself is an instance in point. It has given a new meaning to Karma, Sannyasa, Yajna, etc. It has breathed new life into Hinduism. It has given an original rule of conduct. Not that what the Gita has given was not implied in the previous writings, but the Gita put these implications in a concrete shape. I have endeavoured in the light of a prayerful study of the other faiths of the world and, what is more, in the light of my own experiences in trying to live the teaching of Hinduism, as interpreted in the Gita to give an extended but in no way strained meaning to Hinduism, not as buried in its ample scriptures, but as a living faith speaking like a mother to her aching child. What I have done is perfectly historical. I have followed in the footsteps of our forefathers. At one time they sacrificed animals to propitiate angry gods. Their descendants, but our less remote ancestors, read a different meaning into the word 'sacrifice' and they taught that sacrifice was meant to be of our baser self, to please not angry gods but the one living God within. I hold that the logical outcome of the teaching of the Gita is decidedly for peace at the price of life itself. It is the highest aspiration of the human species.

The Mahabharata and the Ramayana, the two books that millions of Hindus know and regard as their guides, are undoubtedly allegories as the internal evidence shows. That they most probably deal with historical figures does not affect my proposition. Each epic describes the eternal duel that goes on between the forces of darkness and of light. Any way I must disclaim any intention of straining the meaning of Hinduism or the Gita to suit any preconceived notions of mine. My notions were an outcome of a study of the Gita, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Upanishads, etc.

Harijan, 3-10-'36, p. 265

II

(The conversation between two questioners and Gandhiji on different occasions is pieced up together, in the following dialogue.)

Q. : I am told you recite the Bhagavad Gita daily?

A. : Yes we finish the entire Gita reading once every week.

Q. : But at the end of the Gita Krishna recommends violence.

A. : I do not think so. I am also fighting. I should not be fighting effectively if I were fighting violently. The message of the Gita is to be found in the second chapter of the Gita where Krishna speaks of the balanced state of mind, of mental equipoise. In nineteen verses at the close of the second chapter of the Gita Krishna explains how this state can be achieved. It can be achieved, he tells us, after killing all your passions. It is not possible to kill your brother after having killed all your passions. I should like to see that man dealing death — who has no passions, who is indifferent to pleasure and pain, who is undisturbed by the storms that trouble mortal man. The whole thing is described in language of beauty that is unsurpassed. These verses show that the fight Krishna speaks of is a spiritual fight.

Q. : To the common mind it sounds as though it was actual fighting.

A : You must read the whole thing dispassionately in its true context. After the first mention of fighting, there is no mention of fighting at all. The rest is a spiritual discourse.

Q. : Has anybody interpreted it like you?

A. : Yes. The fight is there, but the fight as it is going on within. The Pandavas and Kauravas are the forces of good and evil within. The war is the war between Jekyll and Hyde, God and Satan, going on in the human breast. The internal evidence in support of this interpretation is there in the work itself and in the Mahabharata of which the Gita is a minute part. It is not a history of war between two families, but the history of man — the history of the spiritual struggle of man.

Q. : Is the central teaching of the Gita selfless action or non-violence ?

A. : I have no doubt that it is *anasakti* — selfless action. Indeed I have called my little translation of the Gita *Anasaktiyoga*. And *anasakti* transcends ahimsa. He who would be *anasakta* (selfless) has necessarily to practise non-violence in order to attain the state of selflessness. Ahimsa is, therefore,

a necessary preliminary, it is included in *anasakti,* it does not go beyond it.

Q. : Then does the Gita teach himsa and ahimsa both?

A.: I do not read that meaning in the Gita. It is quite likely that the author did not write to inculcate ahimsa, but as a commentary draws innumerable interpretations from a poetic text, even so I interpret the Gita to mean that if its central theme is *anasakti* it also teaches ahimsa. Whilst we are in the flesh and tread the solid earth, we have to practise ahimsa. In the life beyond there is no himsa or ahimsa.

Q.: But Lord Krishna actually counters the doctrine of Ahimsa. For Arjuna utters this pacifist resolve :

Better I deem it, if my kinsmen strike,
To face them weaponless, and bare my breast
To shaft and spear, than answer blow with blow.

And Lord Krishna teaches him to 'answer blow with blow'.

A.: There I join issue with you. Those words of Arjuna were words of pretentious wisdom. 'Until yesterday,' says Krishna to him, 'you fought your kinsmen with deadly weapons without the silghtest compunction. Even today you would strike if the enemy was a stranger and not your kith and kin!' The question before him was not of non-violence but whether he should slay his nearest and dearest.

Harijan, 21-1-'39 & 1-9-'40

91

ADHIKARA FOR TEACHING GITA !

(Originally appeared under the title "Distortion of Truth")

A correspondent has been endeavouring with the help of the headmaster of a high school to introduce the teaching of the Gita among its boys. But at a recent meeting convened to organize Gita readings a bank manager got up and disturbed the even tenor of the proceedings by saying that students had not the *adhikara* (qualification) for studying the Gita; it was not a plaything to be placed before students. The correspondent sends me a long and argued letter about the incident and sends

in support of his contention some apt sayings from Ramakrishna Paramahamsa from which I cull the following :

> "Boys and youths should be encouraged to seek God. They are like unpecked fruits, being totally untainted by worldly desires. Once such desires have entered their minds, it is very difficult to make them tread the path to salvation.
>
> "Why do I love young men so much? Because they are masters of the whole (16 annas) of their minds, which get divided and sub-divided as they grow up. One-half of the mind of a married man goes to his wife. When a child is born it takes away one-fourth (4 annas), and the remaining one-fourth (4 annas) is scattered over parents, worldly honours, dress, etc. Therefore a young mind can easily know God. It is very difficult for old people to do so.
>
> "The parrot cannot be taught to sing if the membrane of its throat becomes hardened with age. It must be taught while it is young. Similarly, in old age it is difficult for the mind to be fixed on God. It can be easily done so in youth.
>
> "If a *seer* of adulterated milk contains *a chhatank* (sixteenth part of a *seer)* of water, it can be thickened into *kshira* (condensed milk) with very little labour and consumption of fuel. But should there be three *paos* (3/4 *seer)* of water in a *seer*, the milk cannot be easily thickened and a large consumption of fuel will be required. A young mind, being but slightly adulterated with worldly desires can be easily turned towards God; this cannot be done with the minds of old people which are highly adulterated with such desires.
>
> "The tender bamboo can be easily bent, but the full-grown bamboo breaks when an attempt is made to bend it. It is easy to bend young hearts towards God, but the heart of the old escapes the hold when so drawn.
>
> "The human mind is like a package of mustard seed. As it is very difficult to gather the seeds that escape out of a torn package and are scattered in all directions, so when the human mind runs in diverse directions and is occupied with many worldly things, it is not a very easy task to collect and concentrate it. The mind of a youth not running in diverse

> directions, can be easily fixed on anything; but the mind of an old man being totally occupied with worldly things, it is very hard for him to draw it away from them and fix it on God."

I had heard of *adhikara* in connection with the Vedas, but I never knew that the Gita required the qualifications that the bank manager had in mind. It would have been better if he had stated the nature of the qualifications he required. The Gita clearly states that it is meant for all but scoffers. If Hindu students may not read the Gita they may not read any religious works at all. Indeed the original conception in Hinduism is that the student life is the life of a *brahmachari* who should begin it with a knowledge of religion coupled with practice so that he may digest what he learns and weave religious conduct into his life. The student of old began to live his religion before he knew what it was, and this conduct was followed by due enlightenment, so that he might know the reason for the conduct prescribed for him.

Adhikara then there certainly was. But it was the *adhikara* of right conduct known as five *yamas* or cardinal restraints, *ahimsa* (innocence), *satya* (truth), *asteya* (non-stealing), *aparigraha* (non-possession), and *brahmacharya* (celibacy). There were the rules that had to be observed by anybody who wished to study religion. He may not go to religious books for proving the necessity of these fundamentals of religion.

But today the word *adhikara* like many such potent words has suffered distortion, and a dissolute man, simply because he is called a Brahmana, has *adhikara* to read and expound Shastras to us, whereas a man, if he is labelled an untouchable because of his birth in a particular state, no matter how virtuous he may be, may not read them.

But the author of the Mahabharata of which the Gita is a part wrote his great work for the purpose of meeting this insane objections, and made it accessible to all irrespective of the so-called caste, provided, I presume, that he complied with the observances I have described. I add the qualifying expression "I presume" for at the time of writing I do not recall the observance of the *yamas* as a condition precedent to

a person studying the Mahabharata. Experience however shows that the purity of heart and the devotional frame of mind are necessary for a proper understanding of religious books.

The printing age has broken down all barriers and scoffers read religious books with the same freedom (if not greater) that the religiously minded have. But we are here discussing propriety of students reading the Gita as part of religious instruction and devotional exercise. Here I cannot imagine any class of persons more amenable to the restraints and thus more fitted than students for such instruction. Unfortunately it is to be admitted that neither the students nor the instructors in the majority of cases think anything of the real *adhikara* of the five restraints.

Young India, 8-12-’27, p. 408

92
HINDU STUDENTS AND GITA

I

The other day, in the course of a conversation, a missionary friend asked me, if India was really a spiritually advanced country, why it was that he found only a few students having any knowledge of their own religion, even of the Bhagavadgita. In support of the statement, the friend who is himself an educationist told me, that he had made it a point to ask the students he met whether they had any knowledge of their religion or of the Bhagavadgita. A vast majority of them were found to be innocent of any such knowledge.

I do not propose to take up at the present moment the inference, that because certain students had no knowledge of their own religion, India was not a spiritually advanced country, beyond saying that the ignorance on the part of the students of religious books did not necessarily mean absence of all religious life or want of spirituality among the people to which the students belonged. But there is no doubt, that the vast majority of students who pass through the Government educational institutions are devoid of any religious instruction.

The remark of the missionary had reference to the Mysore students, and I was somewhat pained to observe that even the students of Mysore had no religious instruction in the State schools. I know that there is a school of thought which believes in only secular instruction being given in public schools. I know also that in a country like India, where there are most religions of the world represented and where there are so many denominations in the same religion, there must be a difficulty about making provision for religious instruction. But if India is not to declare spiritual bankruptcy, religious instruction of its youth must be held to be at least as necessary as secular instruction. It is true, that knowledge of religious books is no equivalent of that of religion. But if we cannot have religion we must be satisfied with providing our boys and girls with what is next best. And whether there is such instruction given in the schools or not, grown up students must cultivate the art of self-help about matters religious as about others. They may start their own class just as they have their debating and now spinners' clubs.

Addressing the Collegiate High School students at Simoga, I found upon enquiry at the meeting that out of a hundred or more Hindu boys, there were hardly eight who had read the Bhagavadgita. None raised his hand in answer to the question, whether of the few who had read the Gita there was any who understand it. Out of five or six Musalman boys all raised their hands as having read the Koran. But only one could say that he knew its meaning. The Gita is, in my opinion, a very easy book to understand. It does present some fundamental problems which are no doubt difficult of solution. But the general trend of the Gita is in my opinion unmistakable. It is accepted by all Hindu sects as authoritative. It is free from any form of dogma. In a short compass it gives a complete reasoned moral code. It satisfies both the intellect and the heart. It is thus both philosophical and devotional. Its appeal is universal. The language is incredibly simple. But I nevertheless think that there should be an authoritative version in each vernacular, and the translations should be so prepared

as to avoid technicalities and in a manner that would make the teaching of the Gita intelligible to the average man. The suggestion is not intended in any way to supplement the original. For I reiterate my opinion that every Hindu boy and girl should know Sanskrit. But for a long time to come, there will be millions without any knowledge of Sanskrit. It would be suicidal to keep them deprived of the teachings of the Bhagavadgita because they do not know Sanskrit.

Young India, 25-8-'27, p. 272

II

(From the address to the Mannargudi students)

"You state in your address that you read the Gospels daily even as I do. I cannot say that I read the Gospels daily but I can say that I have read the Gospels in a humble and prayerful spirit, and it is well with you if you are also reading the Gospels in that spirit. But I expect that the vast majority of you are Hindu boys. I wish that you could have said to me that at least your Hindu boys were reading the Bhagavadgita daily to derive inspiration. For I believe that all the great religions of the world are true more or less. I say 'more or less' because I believe that everything that the human hand touches by reason of the very fact that human beings are imperfect, becomes imperfect. Perfection is the exclusive attribute of God and it is indescribable, untranslatable. I do believe that it is possible for every human being to become perfect even as God is perfect. It is necessary for us all to aspire after perfection, but when that blessed state is attained, it becomes indescribable, indefinable. And I therefore admit, in all humility, that even the Vedas, the Koran and the Bible are the imperfect word of God, and imperfect beings that we are swayed to and fro by a multitude of passions, it is impossible for us even to understand this word of God in its fulness, and so I say to a Hindu boy, that he must not uproot the traditions in which he has been brought up, as I say to a Musalman or a Christian boy that he must not uproot his traditions. And so whilst I would welcome your learning the Gospel and your learning the Koran, I would

certainly insist on all of you Hindu boys, if I had the power of insistence, learning the Gita. It is my belief that the impurity that we see about boys in schools, the carelessness about things that matter in life, the levity with which the student world deals with the greatest and most fundamental questions of life is due to this uprooting of tradition from which boys have hitherto derived their sustenance.

"But I must not be misunderstood. I do not hold that everything ancient is good because it is ancient. I do not advocate surrender of God-given reasoning faculty in the face of ancient tradition. Any tradition, however ancient, if inconsistent with morality, is fit to be banished from the land. Untouchability may be considered to be an ancient tradition, the institution of child widowhood and child marriage may be considered to be ancient tradition, and even so many an ancient horrible belief and superstitious practice. I would sweep them out of existence if I had the power. When, therefore, I talk of respecting the ancient tradition, you now understand what I mean, and it is because I see the same God in the Bhagavadgita as I see in the Bible and the Koran that I say to the Hindu boys that they will derive greater inspiriation from the Bhagavadgita because they will be tuned to the Gita more than any other book."

Young India, 22-9-'27, p. 317 at p. 319

93
GITA RECITERS

The readers of the *Harijan* know what the *Gita* means to me. I have always regarded the learning by heart of such books as the *Gita* a very desirable thing. But I was never able to learn all the chapters of the *Gita* by heart myself though I made several attempts at it. I know I am very stupid at memorizing. So whenever I meet any one who knows the *Gita* by heart, he or she commands my respect. I have already met two such during the Tamilnad tour — a gentleman at Madura and a lady at Devakotta. The gentleman at Madura is a

merchant unknown to fame; and the lady is Parvatibai, a daughther of the late Justice Sadashiva Iyer, who during his lifetime instituted an annual prize for the person who could best recite the *Gita* from memory. I would like, however, the reciters to realize that the mere recitation is not an end in itself. It should be an aid to the contemplation and assimilation of the meaning and the message of the *Gita.* By patience even a parrot can be taught to recite it by heart. But he would be no wiser for the recitation. The reciter of the *Gita* should be what its author expects him to be — a *yogi* in its broad sense. It demands from its votaries balance in every thought, word and deed and a perfect correspondence between the three. He whose speech and action do not accord with his thoughts is a humbug or a hypoctrite.

Harijan, 2-2-'34

94
THE GITA IDEAL

[Addressing the inmates of the Sabarmati Ashram, Gandhiji said :]

I am a devote of the *Gita* and a firm believer in the inexorable law of *karma.* Even the least little tripping or stumbling is not without its cause and I have wondered why one who has tried to follow the *Gita* in thought, word and deed should have any ailment. The doctors have assured me that this trouble of high blood-pressure is entirely the result of mental strain and worry. If that is true, it is likely that I have been unnecessarily worrying myself, unnecessarily fretting and secretly harbouring passions like anger, lust, etc. The fact that any event or incident should disturb my mental equilibrium, in spite of my serious efforts, means not that the *Gita* ideal is defective but that my devotion to it is defective. The *Gita* ideal is true for all time, my understanding of it and observance of it is full of flaws.

Harijan, 29-2-'36

SECTION FIVE : PRAYER AND NAMAJAPA

95
THE ETERNAL DUEL

A friend writes :

> "In the article entitled "The Tangle of Ahimsa" appearing in *Young India* of October 11th, you have stated most forcefully that cowardice and Ahimsa are incompatible. There is not an ambiguous syllable in your statement. But may I request, that you tell us how cowardice can be exercised from a man's character? I notice that all characters are but the sum total of habits formed. How are we do undo our old habits and build the new ones of courage, intelligence and action? I am convinced that habits can be destroyed, and better and nobler habits can be formed giving birth to a new character in a person. It seems to me that you know prayers, discipline and studies by which a man can attain a second birth. Won't you kindly tell us about them? Do give us your knowledge and advice in one of the numbers of *Young India.* Please help us by giving an account of the method of praying and working by which a man can recreate himself."

The question refers to the eternal duel that is so graphically described in the Mahabharata under the cloak of history and that is every day going on in millions of breasts. Man's destined purpose is to conquer old habits, to overcome the evil in him and to restore good to its rightful place. If religion does not teach us how to achieve this conquest, it teaches us nothing. But there is no royal road to success in this, the truest enterprise in life. Cowardice is perhaps the greatest vice from which we suffer and is also possibly the greatest violence, certainly far greater than bloodshed and the like that generally go under the name of violence. For it comes from want of faith in God and ignorance of His attributes. But I am sorry that I have not the ability to give 'the knowledge and the advice' that the correspondent would have me to give on how to dispel cowardice and other vices. But I can give my own

testimony and say that heart-felt prayer is undoubtedly the most potent instrument that man possesses for overcoming cowardice and all other bad old habits. Prayer is an impossibility without a living faith in the presence of God within.

Christianity and Islam describe the same process as a duel between God and Satan, not outside but within; Zoroastrianism as a duel between Ahurmazd and Ahriman; Hinduism as a duel between forces of good and forces of evil. We have to make our choice whether we should ally ourselves with the forces of evil or with the forces of good. And to pray to God is nothing but that sacred alliance between God and man whereby he attains his deliverance from the clutches of the prince of darkness. But a heartfelt prayer is not a recitation with the lips. It is a yearning from within which expresses itself in every word, every act, nay, every thought of man. When an evil thought successfully assails him, he may know that he offered but a lip prayer and similarly with regard to an evil word escaping his lips or an evil act done by him. Real prayer is an absolute shield and protection against this trinity of evils. Success does not always attend the very first effort at such real living prayer. We have to strive against ourselves, we have to believe in spite of ourselves, because months are as our years. We have, therefore, to cultivate illimitable patience if we will realize the efficacy of prayer. There will be darkness, disappointment and even worse; but we must have courage enough to battle against all these and not succumb to cowardice. There is no such thing as retreat for a man of prayer.

What I am relating is not a fairy tale. I have not drawn an imaginary picuture. I have summed up the testimony of men who have by prayer conquered every difficulty in their upward progress, and I have added my own humble testimony that the more I live the more I realize how much I owe to faith and prayer which is one and the same thing for me. And I am quoting an experience not limited to a few hours, or days or weeks, but extending over an unbroken period of nearly 40 years. I have had my share of disappointments, uttermost darkness, counsels of despair,

counsels of caution, subtlest assaults of pride; but I am able to say that my faith, — and I know that it is still little enough, by no means as great as I want it to be, — has ultimately conquered every one of these difficulties up to now. If we have faith in us, if we have a prayerful heart, we may not tempt God, may not make terms with Him. We must reduce ourselves to a cipher. Barodada* sent me a precious Sanskrit verse not long before his death. It means impliedly that a man of devotion reduces himself to zero. Not until we have reduced ourselves to nothingness can we conquer the evil in us. God demands nothing less than complete self-surrender as the price for the only real freedom that is worth having. And when a man thus loses himself, he immediately finds himself in the service of all that lives. It becomes his delight and his recreation. He is a new man never weary of spending himself in the service of God's creation.

Young India, 20-12-'28, p. 420

96
THE CLEANSING ACTION OF REPENTANCE

(The following extracts are taken from Gandhiji's public address in Delhi, the gist of which appeared in "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal.)

I have ever followed the maxim that one should not let the sun go down upon one's error without confessing it. No mortal is proof against error. Danger consists in concealing one's error, in adding untruth to it in order to gloss it over. When a boil becomes septic you press out the poison and it subsides. But should the poison spread inwards, it would spell certain death. Years ago, in Sabarmati Ashram, we had several cases of small-pox. All those in which eruption came out escaped. But in one case it did not come out, the whole body became red and inflamed and the poor patient died. Even so it is with error and sin. To confess an error or sin as soon as it is discovered is to purge it out.

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* Elder brother of Poet Rabindranath Tagore

There is a saying in English that there is none so fallen but can redeem himself, if only he has the will. We have the promise that no matter how far gone in sin the sinner may be, God will forgive him, if he confesses his sin and repents of it even with his last breath. I believe in future life and in the continuity of Karma through successive births. What we sow here we must reap elsewhere — there is no escape. But if one repents, even on one's death-bed the repentance will burn away sin and sterilize it of consequences.

Harijan, 20-10'46, p. 365 at p. 366

97
WHAT IS PRAYER ?

A medical graduate asks :

> "What is the best form of prayer? How much time would be spent at it? In my opinion to do justice is the best form of prayer and one who is sincere about doing justice to all, does not need to do any more praying. Some people spend a long time over *sandhya* and 95% of them do not understand meaning of what they say. In my opinion, prayer should be said in one's mother-tongue. It alone can affect the soul best. I should say that a sincere prayer for one minute is enough. It should suffice to promise God not to sin."

Prayer means asking God for something in a reverent attitude. But the word is used also to denote any devotional act. Worship is a better term to use for what the correspondent has in mind. But definition apart, what is it that millions of Hindus, Musalmans, Christians and Jews and others do every day during the time set apart for the adoration of the Maker? It seems to me that it is a yearning of the heart to be one with the Maker, an invocation for His blessing. It is in this case the attitude that matters, not words uttered or muttered. And often the association of words that have been handed down from ancient times has an effect which in their rendering into one's mother-tongue they will lose altogether. Thus the Gayatri translated and recited in, say, Gujarati, will not have the same effect as the original. The utterance of the word Rama will

instantaneously affect millions of Hindus, when the word God, although they may understand the meaning, will leave them untouched. Words after all acquire a power by long usage and sacredness associated with their use. There is much, therefore, to be said for the retention of old Sanskrit formulae for the most prevalent *mantras* or verses. That the meaning of them should be properly understood goes without saying.

There can be no fixed rule laid down as to the time these devotional acts should take. It depends upon individual temperament. There are precious moments in one's daily life. The exercises are intended to sober and humble us and enable us to realize that nothing happens without His will and that we are but 'clay in the hands of the Potter'. These are moments when one reviews one's immediate past, confesses one's weakness, asks for forgiveness and strength to be and do better. One minute may be enough for some, twenty-four hours may be too little for others. For those who are filled with the presence of God in them, to labour is to pray. Their life is one continuous prayer or act of worship. For those others who act only to sin, to indulge themselves, and live for self, no time is too much. If they had patience and faith and the will to be pure, they would pray till they feel the definite purifying presence of God within them. For us, ordinary mortals, there must be a middle path between these two extremes. We are not so exalted as to be able to say that all our acts are a dedication, nor perhaps are we so far gone as to be living purely for self. Hence have all religions set apart times for general devotion. Unfortunately these have nowadays become merely mechanical and formal, where they are not hypocritical. What is necessary, therefore, is the correct attitude to accompany these devotions.

For definite personal prayer in the sense of asking God for something, it should certainly be in one's own tongue. Nothing can be grander than to ask God to make us act justly towards everything that lives.

Young India, 10-6-'26, p. 211

98
HOW TO AND WHOM TO PRAY ?

(Translated from *Navajivan*)

"Often, Sir, do you ask us to worship God, to pray but never tell us how to and whom to do so. Will you kindly enlighten me?" asks a reader of *Navajivan*.

Worshipping God is singing the praise of God. Prayer is a confession of one's unworthiness and weakness. God has a thousand names or rather, He is Nameless. We may worship or pray to Him by whichever name that pleases us. Some call Him Rama, some Krishna, others call Him Rahim, and yet others call Him God. All worship the same spirit, but as all foods do not agree with all, all names do not appeal to all. Each chooses the name according to his associations, and He being the In-Dweller, All-Powerful and Omniscient knows our innermost feelings and responds to us according to our deserts.

Worship or prayer, therefore, is not to be performed with the lips, but with the heart. And that is why it can be performed equally by the dumb and the stammerer, by the ignorant and the stupid. And the prayers of those whose tongues are nectared but whose hearts are full of poison are never heard. He, therefore, who would pray to God, must cleanse his heart. Rama was not only on the lips of Hanuman, He was enthroned in his heart. He gave Hanuman exhaustless strength. In His strength he lifted the mountain and crossed the ocean. It is faith that steers us through stormy seas, faith that moves mountains and faith that jumps across the ocean. That faith is nothing but a living, wide awake consciousness of God within. He who has achieved that faith wants nothing. Bodily diseased he is spiritually healthy, physically poor, he rolls in spiritual riches.

"But how is the heart to be cleansed to this extent?" one might well ask. The language of the lips is easily taught but who can teach the language of the heart? Only the Bhakta — the true devotee — knows it and can teach it. The Gita has defined the Bhakta in three places, and talked of him generally everywhere. But a knowledge of the definition of a Bhakta is

hardly a sufficient guide. They are rare on this earth. I have, therefore, suggested the Religion of Service as the means. God of Himself seeks for His seat the heart of him who served his fellowmen. That is why Narasinha Mehta who "saw and knew" sang, "He is a true Vaishnava who knows to melt at other's woe." Such was Abu Ben Adhem. He served his fellowmen, and therefore, his name topped the list of those who served God.

But who are the suffering and the woe-begone? The suppressed and the poverty-stricken. He who would be a Bhakta, therefore, must serve these by body, soul and mind. How can he who regards the "suppressed" classes as untouchables serve them by the body? He who does not even condescend to exert his body to the extent of spinning for the sake of the poor and trots out lame excuses does not know the meaning of service. An able-bodied wretch deserves no alms, but an appeal to work for his bread. Alms debase him. He who spins before the poor inviting them to do likewise serves God as no one else does. "He who gives Me even a trifle as a fruit or a flower or even a leaf in the spirit of Bhakti is my servant", says the Lord in the Bhagavadgita. As he hath his foot-stool where live "the humble, the lowliest and lost", spinning, therefore, for such is the greatest prayer, the greatest worship, the greatest sacrifice.

Prayer, therefore, may be done by any name. A prayerful heart is the vehicle and service makes the heart prayerful. Those Hindus who in this age serve the untouchables from a full heart truly pray; the Hindus and those others who spin prayerfully for the poor and the indigent truly pray.

Young India, 24-9-'25, p. 331

99

MEANING OF AND NECESSITY FOR PRAYER

(Originally appeared under the title "A Discourse on Prayer" by M. D.)

On a beautiful evening, on the prayer ground of the Udyog Mandir, which little patch of ground still retains the name Satyagraha Ashram, Gandhiji gave a talk on prayer to the boys who had come to Ahmedabad for the *Chhatra Sammelan* — conference of hostel boys from Gujarat. The conference attracted a good deal of attention, was largely attended, and great interest was evinced by parents, guardians, teachers and managers of students' hostels in the questions discussed at the conference. One of these was that of suggesting congregational prayers to be made compulsory in hostels. The proposition was lost but a large section did not apparently feel happy about it and they thought that rather than arrive at a decision, after what at best was an amateurish discussion on the subject, they should consult Gandhiji and have a talk from him on the subject. And they could have done nothing better. Gandhiji's insistence on prayer "being the key of the morning and the bolt of the evening" is well known, but the stern discipline that he is now bringing to bear in the Udyog Mandir on carrying out his insistence is a recent phase which has surprised some who, therefore, looked forward to the discourse. He has long been convinced, with the eminent Unitarian preacher, Dr. Hale, that "a child who is early taught that he is God's child, that he may live and move and has his being in God, and that he has, therefore, infinite strength at hand for the conquering of any difficulty, will take life easily and make much of it." But as he said towards the end of the discourse, he had done nothing up to now to translate the conviction into practice, and that is why he was now impatient to repair the omission as soon as possible.

But I must not stand any longer between the reader and the discourse, which was as animated as it was swift, and delivered just after the inmates had finished the evening prayer,

ending up with Surdas' famous hymn, with which readers of the *Autobiography* are familiar :

> "Where is there wretch
> So loathsome and wicked as I ?
> I have forsaken my Maker,
> So faithless have I been."

Here is a substance of the discourse which was in Gujarati :

"I am glad that you all want me to speak to you on the meaning of and the necessity for prayer. I believe that prayer is the very soul and essence of religion, and, therefore, prayer must be the very core of the life of man, for no man can live without religion. There are some who in the egotism of their reason declare that they have nothing to do with religion. But it is like a man saying that he breathes but that he has no nose. Whether by reason or by instinct, or by superstition, man acknowledges some sort of relationship with the divine. The rankest agnostic or atheist does acknowledge the need of a moral principle, and associates something good with its observance and something bad with its non-observance. Bradlaugh, whose atheism is well known, always insisted on proclaiming his innermost conviction. He had to suffer a lot for thus speaking the truth, but he delighted in it and said that truth is its own reward. Not that he was quite insensible to the joy resulting from the observance of truth. This joy, however, is not at all worldly, but springs out of communion with the divine. That is why I have said that even a man who disowns religion cannot and does not live without religion.

"Now I come to the next thing, viz., that prayer is the very core of man's life, as it is the most vital part of religion. Prayer is either petitional or in its wider sense is inward communion. In either case the ultimate result is the same. Even when it is petitional, the petition should be for the cleansing and purification of the soul, for freeing it from the layers of ignorance and darkness that envelop it. He, therefore, who hungers for the awakening of the divine in him must fall back on prayer. But prayer is no mere exercise of words or of

the ears, it is no mere repetition of empty formula. Any amount of repetition of Ramanama is futile if it fails to stir the soul. It is better in prayer to have a heart without words than words without a heart. It must be in clear response to the spirit which hungers for it. And even as a hungry man relishes a hearty meal, a hungry soul will relish a heart-felt prayer. And I am giving you a bit of my experience and that of my companions when I say that he who has experienced the magic of prayer may do without food for days together but not a single moment without prayer. For without prayer there is no inward peace.

"If that is the case, some one will say, we should be offering our prayers every minute of our lives. There is no doubt about it, but we, erring mortals, who find it difficult to retire within ourselves for inward communion even for a single moment, will find it impossible to remain perpetually in communion with the divine. We, therefore, fix some hours when we make a serious effort to throw off the attachments of the world for a while, we make a serious endeavour to remain, so to say, out of the flesh. You have heard Surdas' hymn. It is the passionate cry of a soul hungering for union with the divine. According to our standards he was a saint, but according to his own he was a proclaimed sinner. Spiritually he was miles ahead of us, but he felt the separation from the divine so keenly that he has uttered that anguished cry in loathing and despair.

"I have talked of the necessity for prayer, and there-through I have dealt with the essence of prayer. We are born to serve our fellowmen, and we cannot properly do so unless we are wide awake. There is an eternal struggle raging in man's breast between the powers of darkness and of light, and he who has not the sheet-anchor of prayer to rely upon will be a victim to the powers of darkness. The man of prayer will be at peace with himself and with the whole world, the man who goes about the affairs of the world without a prayerful heart will be miserable and will make the world also miserable. Apart therefore from its bearing on man's condition after

death, prayer has incalculable value for man in this world of the living. Prayer is the only means of bringing about orderliness and peace and repose in our daily acts. We inmates of the Ashram who came here in search of truth and for insistence on truth professed to believe in the efficacy of prayers, but had never up to now made it a matter of vital concern. We did not bestow on it the care that we did on other matters. I awoke from my slumbers one day and realized that I had been woefully negligent of my duty in the matter. I have, therefore, suggested measures of stern discipline and far from being any the worse, I hope we are the better for it. For it is so obvious. Take care of the vital thing and other things will take care of themselves. Rectify one angle of a square, and the other angles will be automatically right.

"Begin, therefore, your day with prayer, and make it so soulful that it may remain with you until the evening. Close the day with prayer so that you may have a peaceful night free from dreams and nightmares. Do not worry about the form of prayer. Let it be any form, it should be such as can put us into communion with the divine. Only whatever be the form, let not the spirit wander while the words of prayer run on out of your mouth.

"If what I have said has gone home to you, you will not be at peace until you have compelled your hostel superintendents to interest themselves in your prayer and to make it obligatory. Restraint self-imposed is no compulsion. A man, who chooses the path of freedom from restraint, i.e. of self-indulgence, will be a bondslave of passions, whilst the man who binds himself to rules and restraints releases himself. All things in the universe, including the sun and the moon and the stars, obey certain laws. Without the restraining influence of these laws the world would not go on for a single moment. You, whose mission in life is service of your fellowmen, will go to pieces if you do not impose on yourselves some sort of discipline, and prayer is a necessary spiritual discipline. It is discipline and restraint that separates us from the brute. If we will be men walking with our heads erect and not walking on

all fours, let us understand and put ourselves under voluntary discipline and restraint."

Young India, 23-1-'30, p. 25

100
NO FAITH IN PRAYER !

I

Here is a letter written by a student to the Principal of a national institution, asking to be excused from attending its prayer meetings :

> "I beg to state that I have no belief in prayer, as I do not believe in anything known as God to which I should pray. I never feel any necessity of supposing a God for myself. What do I lose if I do not care for Him, and calmly and sincerely work my own schemes ?
>
> "So far as congregational prayer is concerned, it is of no use. Can such a huge mass of men enter into any mental concentration upon a thing, however trifling it may be? Are the little and ignorant children expected to fix their fickle attention on the subtlest ideas of our great scriptures, God and soul and equality of all men and many other high-sounding phrases? This great performance is required to be done at a particular time at the command of a particular man. Can love for the so-called Lord take its root in the hearts of boys by any such mechanical function? Nothing can be more repugnant to reason than to expect the same behaviour from men of every temperament. Therefore, prayer should not be a complusion. Let those pray who have a taste for it, and those avoid who dislike it. Anything done without conviction is an immoral and degrading action."

Let us first examine the worth of the last idea. Is it an immoral and degrading act to submit to discipline before one begins to have conviction about its necessity ? Is it immoral and degrading to study subjects according to the school syllabus, if one has no conviction about its utility ? May a boy

be excused from studying his vernacular, if he has persuaded himself that it is useless? Is it not truer to say that a school boy has no conviction about the things he has to learn or the discipline he has to go through? His choice is exhausted if he had it, when he elected to belong to an institution. His joining one means that he will willingly submit to its rules and regulations. It is open to him to leave it, but he may not choose what or how he will learn.

It is for teachers to make attractive and intelligible, what to the pupils may, at first appear repulsive or uninteresting.

It is easy enough to say : "I do not believe in God." For, God permits all things to be said of Him with impunity. He looks at our acts. And any breach of His Law carries with it, not its vindictive, but its purifying, compelling, punishment. God's existence cannot be, does not need to be, proved. God is. If He is not felt, so much the worse for us. The absence of feeling is a disease which we shall some day throw off *nolens volens*.

But a boy may not argue. He must, out of sense of discipline, attend prayer meetings, if the institution to which he belongs requires such attendance. He may respectfully put his doubts before his teachers. He need not believe what does not appeal to him. But if he has respect for his teacher, he will *do* without believing what he is asked to do, not out of fear, nor out of churlishness, but with the knowledge that it is right for him so to do, and with the hope that what is dark to him today will some day be made clear to him.

Prayer is not an asking. It is a longing of the soul. It is a daily admission of one's weakness. The tallest among us has a perpetual reminder of his nothingness before death, disease, old age, accidents, etc. We are living in the midst of death. What is the value of 'working for our own schemes' when they might be reduced to naught in the twinkling of an eye, or when we may, equally swiftly and unawares, be taken away from them? But we may feel strong as a rock, if we could truthfully say: 'We work for God and His schemes.' Then, all is as clear as day-light. Then, nothing perishes. All perishing is, then, only what seems. Death and destruction have *then, but only then,* no reality about

them. For, death and destruction is then but a change. An artist destroys his picture for creating a better one. A watchmaker throws away a bad spring to put in a new and a useful one.

A congregational prayer is mighty thing. What we do not often do alone, we do together. Boys do not need conviction. If they merely attend in obedience to the call to prayer, without inward resistence, they feel the exaltation. But many do not. They are even mischievous. All the same the unconscious effect cannot be resisted. Are there not boys who at the commencement of their career were scoffers, but who subsequently became mighty believers in the efficacy of congregational prayer? It is a common experience for men, who have no robust faith, to seek the comfort of congregational prayer. All who flock to churches, temples, or mosques are not scoffers or humbugs. They are honest men and women. For them congregational prayer is like a daily bath, a necessity of their existence. These places of worship are not a mere idle superstition to be swept away at the first opportunity. They have survived all attacks up to now, and are likely to persist to the end of time.

Young India, 23-9-'26, p. 333

II

(Originally appeared under the title "Tyranny of Words")

A correspondent thus writes on my article "No Faith in Prayer":

> "In your article bearing the above caption, you hardly do justice to the 'boy' or to your own position as a great thinker. It is true that the expressions used by the writer in his letter are not all happy, but of his charity of thought there is no doubt. It is also *very* evident that he is not a boy as the word is understood. I should be much surprised to find him under twenty. Even if he is young, he seems to show sufficient intellectual development, not to be treated in the manner of 'a boy may not argue'. The writer of the letter is a rationalist while you are a believer, two age-old types with age-old conflict. The attitude of the one is, 'Let me be convinced and I

shall believe', that of the other is, 'Believe and conviction shall come'. The first appeals to reason, the second appeals to authority. You seem to think that agnosticism is but a passing phase among all young people, and the faith comes to them sooner or later. There is the well-known case of Swami Vivekananda to support your view. You, therefore, proceed to prescribe a compulsory dose of prayer to the 'boy' for his own good. Your reasons are twofold. Firstly, prayer for its own sake, as a recognition of one's own littleness, and mightiness and goodness of the supposed higher being. Secondly, for its utility, for the solace it brings to those who want to be solaced. I shall dispose of the second argument first. Here it is recommended as a sort of staff to the weak. Such are the trials of life, and such is their power to shatter reason of men that great many people may need prayer and faith some time. They have a right to it and they are welcome to it. But there have been, and there are always, some true rationalists — few, no doubt — who have never felt the necessity of either. There is also the class of people who, while they are not aggressive doubters, are indifferent to religion.

"As all people do not ultimately require the help of prayer, and as those who feel its necessity are *free* to take to it, and do take to it when required, complsuion in prayer, from the point of utility cannot be upheld. Compulsory physical exercise and education may be necessary for physical and mental development of a person, not so the belief in God and prayer for the moral side. Some of the world's greatest agnostics have been the most moral men. To these, I suppose, you would recommend prayer for its own sake, as an expression of humility, in fact, your first argument. Too much has been made of this humility. So vast is knowledge that even the greatest scientists have felt humble sometimes, but their general trait has been that of *masterful* enquiry, their faith in their own powers has been as great as their conquest of nature. Had it not been so, we should still be scratching earth with bare fingers for roots, nay, we should have been wiped out of the surface of the earth.

"During the Ice Age, when human beings were dying of cold and fire was first discovered, your prototype in that age must have taunted the discoverer with : 'What is the use of your schemes, of what avail are they against the power and wrath of God?' The humble have been promised the Kingdom of God hereafter. We do not know whether they will get it, but here on this earth their portion is serfdom. To revert to the main point, your assertion about 'accept the belief and the faith shall come' is too true, terribly true. Much of religious fanaticism of this world can be traced directly to this kind of teaching. Provided you catch them young enough, you can make a good majority of human beings believe in *anything*. That is how your orthodox Hindu, or fanatical Mahomedan, is manufactured. There are, of course, always a small few in either community who will outgrow these beliefs that have been forced upon them. Do you know that if the Hindus and Mahomedans stopped studying their scripctures, until they reached maturity, they would not be such fanatical believers in their dogmas, and would cease to quarrel for their sake? Secular education is the remedy for Hindu-Muslim riots, but, you are not made that way.

"Great as our debt is to you for setting an unprecedented example in courage, action and sacrifice in this country where people have been always *much* afraid, when the final judgment is passed on your work, it will be said that your influence gave a great set-back to intellectual progress in this country."

I do not know the meaning of boy 'as the word is ordinarily understood', if a 20-year old lad is not a boy. Indeed, I would call all school-going persons boys and girls, irrespective of their ages. But whether the doubting student may be called a boy or a man, my arguments must stand. A student is like a soldier (and a soldier may be 40 years old) who may not argue about matters of discipline, when he has put himself and chooses to remain under it. A soldier may not remain a unit in his regiment and have the option of doing or not doing things he is asked to do. Similarly, a student, no matter how wise or old he is, surrenders when he joins a school or a college the right of rejecting its dicipline. Here,

there is no under-rating or despising the intelligence of the student. It is an aid to his intelligence for him to come voluntarily under discipline. But my correspondent willingly bears the heavy yoke of the tyranny of words. He scents 'compulsion' in every act that displeases the doer. But there is compulsion and compulsion. We call self-imposed compulsion self-restraint. We hug it and grow under it. But compulsion to be shunned even at the cost of life, is restraint super-imposed upon as against our wills, and often with the object of humiliating us and robbing us of our dignity as men and boys, if you will. Social restraints generally are healthy, and we reject them to our own undoing. Submission to crawling orders is unmanly and cowardly. Worse still is the submission to the multitude of passions that crowd round us every moment of our lives, ready to hold us their slaves.

But the correspondent has yet another word that holds him in its chains. It is the mighty word 'rationalism'. Well, I had a full dose of it. Experience has humbled me enough to let me realize the specific limitations of reason. Just as matter misplaced becomes dirt, reason misused becomes lunacy. If we would but render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, all would be well.

Rationalists are admirable beings. Rationalism is a hideous monster when it claims for itself omnipotence. Attribution of omnipotence to reason is as bad a piece of idolatry as is worship of stock and stone, believing it to be God.

Who has reasoned out the use of prayer? Its use is felt after practice. Such is the world's testimony. Cardinal Newman never surrendered his reason, but he yielded a better place to prayer when he humbly sang: 'One step enough for me.' Shankara was a prince among reasoners.There is hardly anything in the world's literature to surpass Shankara's rationalism. But he yielded the first place to prayer and faith.

The correspondent has made a hasty generalization from the fleeting and disturbing events that are happening before us. But everything on this earth lends itself to abuse. It seems to be a law governing everything pertaining to man. No doubt, religion has to answer for some of the most terrible crimes in history. But

that is the fault not of religion, but of the ungovernable brute in man. He has not yet shed the effects of his brute ancestry.

I do not know a single rationalist who has never done anything in simple faith, and has based every one of his acts on reason. But we all know millions of human beings, living their more or less orderly lives because of their child-like faith in the Maker of us all. That very faith is a prayer. The 'boy', on whose letter I based by article, belongs to that vast mass of humanity, and the article was written to steady him and his fellow-searchers, not to disturb the happiness of rationalists like the correspondent.

But he quarrels even with the bent that is given to the youth of the world by their elders and teachers. But that, it seems, is an inseparable handicap (if it be one) of impressionable age. Purely secular education is also an attempt to mould the young mind after a fashion. The correspondent is good enough to grant that the body and the mind may be trained and directed. Of the soul, which makes the body and the mind possible, he has no care or perhaps he is in doubt as to its existence. But this belief cannot avail him. He cannot escape the consequence of his reasoning. For, why may not a believer argue, on the correspondent's own ground, and say he must influence the soul of boys and girls, even as the others influence the body and the intelligence? The evils of religious instructions will vanish with the evolution of the true religious spirit. To give up religious instruction is like letting a field lie fallow, and grow weeds for want of the tillers' knowledge of the proper use of the field.

The correspondent's excursion into the great discoveries of the ancients is really irrelevant to the subject under discussion. No one questions, I do not, the utility or the brilliance of those discoveries. They were generally a proper field for the use and exercise of reason. But they, the ancients, did not delete from their lives the predominant function of faith and prayer. Works without faith and prayer, are like an artifical flower that has no fragrance. I plead, not for the suppression of reason, but for a due recognition of that in us which sanctifies reason itself.

Young India, 14-10-'26, p. 358

101
PRAYER, THE FIRST AND THE LAST LESSON IN SACRIFICING SELF

(Originally appeared under the title "Let Us Pray")

There is little doubt that India is about to reach her cherished goal of political independence. Let the entrance be prayerful. Prayer is not an old woman's idle amusement. Properly understood and applied, it is the most potent instrument of actions.

Let us then pray and find out what we meant by non-violence and how we shall retain the freedom gained by its use. If our non-violence is of the weak, it follows that we shall never be able, by such non-violence, to retain freedom. But it follows also that we shall not, for some length of time at any rate, be able to defend ourselves by force of arms if only because we have neither them nor the knowledge of their use. We have not even the requisite discipline. The result is that we shall have to rely upon another nation's help, not as equals but as pupils upon their teachers, if the word 'inferiors' jars upon our ears.

Hence there is nothing but non-violence to fall back upon for retaining our freedom even as we had to for gaining it. This means exercise of non-violence against all those who call themselves our opponents. This should not mean much for a man who has used himself to non-violence for nearly three decades. It is summed up in "die for your honour and freedom" instead of "kill if necessary and be killed in the act". What does a brave soldier do? He kills only if necessary and risks his life in the act. Non-violence demands greater courage and sacrifice. Why should it be comparatively easy for a man to risk death in the act of killing and almost superhuman for him to do so in the act of sparing life? It seems to be gross self-deception to think that we can risk death if we learn and practise the art of killing but cannot do so otherwise. But for the hypnotism induced by the repetition of an untruth we should not grossly deceive ourselves.

But the critic or scoffer will ask, why bring in prayer if the matter is so simple as you put it. The answer is that prayer is the first and the last lesson in learning the noble and brave art of sacrificing self in the various walks of life culminating in the defence of one's nation's liberty and honour.

Undoubtedly prayer requires a living faith in God. Successful Satyagraha is inconceivable without that faith. God may be called by any other name so long as it connotes the living Law of Life — in other words, the Law and the Law-giver rolled into one.

Harijan, 14-4-'46, p. 80

102
PERSONAL TESTIMONY ON PRAYER

(The following talk on prayer by Gandhiji is reproduced from the letter by M. D. on his voyage to London which appeared under the title "From S. S. *Rajputana* — II".)

But perhaps even a greater centre of attraction . . . has been the prayer that we have every evening. The morning prayers are too early to attract these friends, but practically all Indians, (who number over 40), — Hindus, Musalmans, Parsis, Sikhs, — and a sprinkling of Europeans attend the evening prayers. At the request of some of these friends a fifteen minutes' talk after prayer and before dinner has become a daily feature, and I propose to share the first two talks with the readers of *Young India*. A question is asked each evening, and Gandhiji replies to it the next. One of the Indian passengers — a Musalman youth asked Gandhiji to give his personal testimony on prayer, not a theoretical discourse but a narration of what he had felt and experienced as a result of prayer. Gandhiji liked the question immensely, and poured out his personal testimony from a full heart. "Prayer," said he, "has been the saving of my life. Without it I should have been a lunatic long ago. *My Autobiography* will tell you, that I have had my fair share of the bitterest public and private experiences. They threw me into temporary despair, but if I

was able to get rid of it, it was because of prayer. Now I may tell you, that prayer has not been part of my life in the sense that truth has been. It came out of sheer necessity, as I found myself in a plight when I could not possibly be happy without it. And the more my faith in God increased, the more irresistible became the yearning for prayer. Life seemed to be dull and vacant without it. I had attended the Christian service in South Africa, but it had failed to grip me. I could not join them in prayer. They supplicated God, but I could not do so, I failed egregiously. I started with disbelief in God and prayer and until at a late stage in life I did not feel anything like a void in life. But at that stage I felt that as food was indispensable for the body, so was prayer indispensable for the soul. In fact food for the body is not so necessary as prayer for the soul. For starvation is often necessary in order to keep the body in health, but there is no such thing as prayer-starvation. You cannot possibly have a surfeit of prayer. Three of the greatest teachers of the world — Buddha, Jesus, Mohammed — have left unimpeachable testimony, that they found illumination through prayer and could not possibly live without it. But to come nearer home millions of Hindus and Musalmans and Christians find their only solace in life in prayer. Either you vote them down as liars or self-deluded people. Well, then, I will say that this lying has a charm for me, a truth-seeker, if it is 'lying' that has given me that mainstay or staff of life, without which I could not bear to live for a moment. In spite of despair staring me in the face on the political horizon, I have never lost my peace. In fact I have found people who envy my peace. That peace, I tell you, comes from prayer. I am not a man of learning but I humbly claim to be a man of prayer. I am indifferent as to the form. Every one is a law unto himself in that respect. But there are some well-marked roads, and it is safe to walk along the beaten tracks trod by the ancient teachers. Well, I have given my practical testimony. Let every one try and find, that as a result of daily prayer he adds something new to his life, something with which nothing can be compared."

"But," said another youth the nexrt evening, "Sir, whilst you start with belief in God, we start with unbelief. How are we to pray?"

"Well," said Gandhiji, "it is beyond my power to induce in you a belief in God. There are certain things which are self-proved, and certain which are not proved at all. The existence of God is like a geometrical axiom. It may be beyond our heart-grasp. I shall not talk of an intellectual grasp. Intellectual attempts are more or less failures, as a rational explanation cannot give you the faith in a living God. For it is a thing beyond the grasp of reason. It transcends reason. There are numerous phenomena from which you can reason out the existence of god, but I shall not insult your intelligence by offering you a rational explanation of that type. I would have you brush aside all rational explanations and begin with a simple childlike faith in God. If I exist God exists. With me it is a necessity of my being as it is with millions. They may not be able to talk about it, but from their life you can see that it is part of their life. I am only asking you to restore the belief that has been undermined. In order to do so, you have to unlearn a lot of literature that dazzles your intelligence and throws you off your feet. Start with the faith which is also a token of humility and an admission that we know nothing, that we are less than atoms in this universe. We are less than atoms, I say, because the atom obeys the law of its being, whereas we in the insolence of our ignorance deny the law of nature. But I have no argument to address to those who have no faith.

"Once you accept the existence of God, the necessity for prayer is unescapable. Let us not make the astounding claim, that our whole life is a prayer, and therefore, we need not sit down at a particular hour to pray. Even men who were all their time in tune with the Infinite did not make such a claim. Their lives were a continuous prayer, and yet for our sake, let us say, they offered prayer at set hours, and renewed each day the oath of loyalty to God. God of course never insists on the oath, but we must renew our pledge every day, and I assure you we shall then be free from every imaginable misery in life."

Young India, 24-9-'31, p. 272 at p. 274

103
THE FORM OF MY PRAYER

(From "Non-violence and World Crisis" by Pyarelal)

A missionary who called on Gandhiji at his retreat in Segaon asked him, "What is your method of worship?"

In reply, Gandhiji said : "We have joint worship morning and evening at 4-20 a.m. and 7 p.m. This has gone on for years. We have a recitation of verses from the Gita and other accepted religious books, also hymns of saints with or without music. Individual worship cannot be described in words. It goes on continuously and even unconsciously. There is not a moment when I do not feel the presence of a witness whose eye misses nothing and with whom I strive to keep in tune. I do not pray as Christian friends do. Not because I think there is anything wrong in it, but because words won't come to me. I suppose it is a matter of habit."

Missionary : Is there any place for supplication in your prayer?

Gandhiji : There is and there is not. God knows and anticipates our wants. The Deity does not need my supplication, but I, a very imperfect human being, do need His protection as a child that of its father. And yet I know that nothing I do is going to change His plans. You may call me a fatalist, if you like.

Missionary : Do you find any response to your prayer?

Gandhiji : I consider myself a happy man in that respect. I have never found Him lacking in response. I have found Him nearest at hand when the horizen seemed darkest — in my ordeals in jails when it was not all smooth sailing for me. I cannot recall a moment in my life when I had a sense of desertion by God.

Harijan, 24-12-'38, p. 392 at p. 395

104
THE PLACE OF PRAYER IN ASHRAM LIFE

(Translated into English from Gujarati by V. G. Desai)

I

If insistence on truth constitutes the root of the Ashram, prayer is the principal feeder of that root. The social (as distinguished from the individual) activities of the Ashram commence every day with the congregational morning worship at 4-15 to 4-45 a.m. and close with the evening prayer at 7 to 7-30 p.m. Ever since the Ashram was founded, not a single day has passed to my knowledge without this worship. I know of several occasions when owing to the rains only one responsible person was present on the prayer ground. All immates are expected to attend the worship except in the case of illness or similar compelling reason for absence. This expectation has been fairly well fulfilled at the evening prayer, but not in the morning.

The time for morning worship was as a matter of experiment fixed at 4, 5, 6 and 7 a.m. one after another. But on account of my persistently strong attitude on the subject, it has been fixed at last at 4-20 a.m. With the first bell at 4 every one rises from bed and after a wash reaches the prayer ground by 4.20.

I believe that in a country like India the sooner a man rises from bed the better. Indeed millions must necessarily rise early. If the peasant is a late riser, his crops will suffer damage. Cattle are attended to and cows are milked early in the morning. Such being the case, seekers of saving truth, servants of the people or monks may well be up at 2 or 3; it would be surprising if they are not. In all countries of the world devotees of God and tillers of the soil rise early. Devotees take the name of god and peasant work in their fields serving the world as well as themselves. To my mind both are worshippers. Devotees are deliberately such while cultivators by their industry worship God unawares, as it helps to sustain world. If

instead of working in the fields, they took to religious meditation, they would be failing in their duty and involving themselves and the world in ruin.

We may or may not look upon the cultivator as a devotee, but where peasants, labourers and other people have willy nilly to rise early, how can a worshipper of Truth or servant of the people be a late riser? Again in the Ashram we are trying to co-ordinate work and worship. Therefore I am definitely of opinion that all able-bodied people in the Ashram must rise early even at the cost of inconvenience. 4 a.m. is not early but the latest time when we must be up and doing.

Then again we have to take a decision on certain questions. Where should the prayers be offered? Should we erect a temple or meet in the open air? Then again, should we raise a platform or sit in the sands or the dust? Should there be any images? At last we decided to sit on the sands under the canopy of the sky and not to install any images. Poverty is an Ashram observance. The Ashram exists in order to serve the starving millions. The poor have a place in it no less than others. It received with open arms all who are willing to keep the rules. In such an institution, the house of worship cannot be built with bricks and mortar, the sky must suffice for roof and the quarters for walls and pillars. A platform was planned but discarded later on, as its size would depend upon the indeterminate number of worshippers. And a big one would cost a large sum of money. Experience has shown the soundness of the decision not to build a house or even a platform. People from outside also attend the Ashram prayers so that at times the multitude present cannot be accommodated on the biggest of platforms.

Again as the Ashram prayers are being increasingly imitated elsewhere, the sky-roofed temple has proved its utility. Morning and evening prayers are held wherever I go. Then there is such large attendance, especially in the evening, that prayers are possible only on open grounds. And if I had been in the habit of worshipping in a prayer hall only, I might perhaps never have thought of public prayers during tours.

Then again all religions are accorded equal respect in the Ashram. Followers of all faiths are welcome there; they may or may not believe in the worship of images. No image is kept at the congregational worship of the Ashram in order to avoid hurting anybody's feelings. But if an Ashramite wishes to keep an image in his room he is free to do so.

II

At the morning prayer we first recite the *shlokas* (verses) printed in *Ashram Bhajanvali* (hymnal), and then sing one *bhajan* (hymn) followed by Ramadhun (repetition of Ramanama) and Gitapath (recitation of the Gita). In the evening we have recitation of the last 19 verses of the second chapter of the Gita, one *bhajan* and Ramadhun and then read some portion of a sacred book.

The *shlokas* were selected by Shri Kaka Kalelkar who has been in the Ashram since its foundation. Shri Maganlal Gandhi met him in Santiniketan, when he and the children of the Phoenix Settlement went there from South Africa while I was still in England. Dinbhadhu Andrews and the late Mr. Pearson were then in Santiniketan. I had advised Maganlal to stay at some place selected by Andrews. And Andrews selected Santiniketan for the party. Kaka was a teacher there and came into close contact with Maganlal. Maganlal had been feeling the want of a Sanskrit teacher which was supplied by Kaka. Chintamani Shastri assisted him in the work. Kaka taught the children how to recite the verses repeated in prayer. Some of these verses were omitted in the Ashram prayer in order to save time. Such is the history of the verses recited at the morning prayer all these days.

The recitation of the verses has often been objected to on the ground of saving time or because it appeared to some people that they could not well be recited by a worshipper of truth or by a non-Hindu. There is no doubt that these verses are recited only in Hindu society, but I cannot see why a non-Hindu may not join in or be present at the recitation. Muslim and Christian friends who have heard the verses have not raised any

objection. Indeed they need not cause annoyance to any one who respects other faiths as much as he respects his own. They do not contain any reflection on other people. Hindus being in an overwhelming majority in the Ashram, the verses must be selected from the sacred books of the Hindus. Not that nothing is sung or recited from non-Hindu scriptures. Indeed there were occasions on which Imamsaheb recited verses from the Koran.* Muslim and Christian hymns are often sung.

But the verses were strongly attacked from the standpoint of truth. An Ashramite modestly but firmly argued that the worship of Sarasvati, Ganesh and the like was violence done to truth; for no such divinities really existed as Sarasvati seated on a lotus with a *vina* (kind of musical instrument) in her hands, or as Ganesh with a big belly and an elephant's trunk. To this argument I replied as follows:

"I claim to be a votary of truth, and yet I do not mind reciting these verses or teaching them to the children. If we condemn some *shlokas* on the strength of his argument, it would be tantamount to an attack on the very basis of Hinduism. Not that we may not condemn anything in Hinduism which is fit for condemnation, no matter how ancient it is. But I do not believe that this is a weak or vulnerable point of Hinduism. On the other hand I hold that it is perhaps characteristic of our faith. Sarasvati and Ganesh are not independent entities. They are all descriptive names of one God. Devoted poets have given a local habitation and a name to His countless attributes. They have done nothing wrong. Such verses deceive neither the worshippers nor others. When a human being praises God he imagines Him to be such as he thinks fit. The God of his imagination is there for him. Even when we pray to a God devoid of form and attributes, we do in fact endow Him with attributes. And attributes too are form. Fundamentally God is indescribable in words. We mortals must of necessity depend upon the imagination which makes and

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* Recitation of short passage from the Koran has since been made an integral part of the Ashram prayer. - V. G. D.

sometimes mars us too. The qualities we attribute to God with the purest of motives are true for us but fundamentally false, because all attempts at describing Him must be unsuccessful. I am intellectually conscious of this and still I cannot help dwelling upon the attributes of God. My intellect can exercise no influence over my heart. I am prepared to admit that my heart in its weakness hankers after a God with attributes. The *shlokas* which I have been reciting every day for the last fifteen years give me peace and hold good for me. In them I find beauty as well as poetry. Learned men tell many stories about Sarasvati, Ganesh and the like, which have their own use. I do not know their deeper meaning, as I have not gone into it, finding it unnecessary for me. It may be that my ignorance is my salvation. I did not see that I needed to go deep into this as a part of my quest of truth. It is enough that I know my God, and although I have still to realize His living presence, I am on the right path to my destination."

I could hardly expect that the objectors should be satisfied with this reply. An *ad hoc* committee examined the whole question fully and finally recommended that the *shlokas* should remain as they were for every possible selection would be viewed with disfavour by some one or other.

III

A hymn was sung after the *shlokas*. Indeed singing hymns was the only item of the prayers in South Africa. The *shlokas* were added in India. Maganlal Gandhi was our leader in song. But we felt that the arrangement was unsatisfactory. We should have an expert singer for the purpose, and that singer should be one who would observe the Ashram rules. One such was found in Narayan Moreshvar Khare, a pupil of Pandit Vishnu Digambar, whom the master kindly sent to the Ashram. Pandit Khare gave us full satisfaction and is now a full member of the Ashram. He made hymn-singing interesting, and the *Ashram Bhajanvali* (hymnal) which is now read by thousands was in the main compiled by him. He introduced Ramadhun, the third item of our prayers.

The fourth item is recitation of verses from the Gita. The Gita has for years been an authoritative guide to belief and conduct for the Satyagraha Ashram. It has provided us with a test with which to determine the correctness or otherwise of ideas and courses of conduct in question. Therefore we wished that all Ashramites should understand the meaning of the Gita and if possible commit it to memory. If this last was not possible, we wished that they should at least read the original Sanskrit with correct pronounciation. With this end in view we began to recite part of the Gita every day. We would recite a few verses every day and continue the recitation until we had learnt them by heart. From this we proceeded to the *parayan*. And the recitation is now so arranged that the whole of the Gita is finished in fourteen days, and every body knows what verses will be recited on any particular day. The first chapter is recited on every alternate Friday, and we shall come to it on Friday next (June 10, 1932). The seventh and eighth, the twelfth and thirteenth, the fourteenth and fifteenth, and the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters are recited on the same day in order to finish 18 chapters in 14 days.*

At the evening prayer we recite the last 19 verses of the second chapter of the Gita as well as sing a hymn and repeat Ramanama. These verses describe the characteristics of the *shitaprajna* (the man of stable understanding), which a Satyagrahi too must acquire, and are recited in order that he may constantly bear them in mind.

Repeating the same thing at prayer from day to day is objected to on the ground that it thus becomes mechanical and tends to be ineffective. It is true that the prayer becomes mechanical. We ourselves are machines, and if we believe God to be our mover, we must behave like machines in His hands. If the sun and other heavenly bodies did not work like machines, the

*Later on the Gita recitation was finished every seven instead of every fourteen days, and the chapters were distributed among the days as follows: Friday, 1 and 2; Saturday, 3, 4 and 5; Sunday, 6, 7 and 8; Monday, 9, 10, 11 and 12; Tuesday, 13, 14 and 15; Wednesday, 16 and 17; Thursday, 18. — V. G. D.

universe would come to a standstill. But in behaving like machines, we must behave like inert matter. We are intelligent beings and must observe rules as such. The point is not whether the contents of the prayer are always the same or differ from day to day. Even if they are full of variety, it is possible that they will become ineffective. The Gayatri verse among Hindus, the confession of faith *(kalma)* among Musalmans, the typical Christian prayer in the Sermon on the Mount have been recited by millions for centuries every day; and yet their power has not diminished but is ever on the increase. It all depends upon the spirit behind the recitation. If an unbeliever or a parrot repeats these potent words, they will fall quite flat. On the other hand when a believer utters them always, their influence grows from day to day. Our staple food is the same. The wheat-eater will take other things besides wheat, and these additional things may differ from time to time, but the wheat bread will always be there on the dining table. It is the eater's staff of life, and he will never weary of it. If he conceives a dislike for it, that is a sign of the approaching dissolution of his body. The same is the case with prayer. Its principal contents must be always the same. If the soul hungers after them, she will not quarrel with the monotony of the prayer but will derive nourishment from it. She will have a sense of deprivation on the day that it has not been possible to offer prayer. She will be more downcast than one who observes a physical fast. Giving up food may now and then be beneficial for the body; indigestion of prayer for the soul is something never heard of.

The fact is that many of us offer prayer without our soul being hungry for it. It is a fashion to believe that there is a soul; so we believe that she exists. Such is the sorry plight of many among us. Some are intellectually convinced that there is a soul, but they have not grasped that truth with the heart; therefore they do not feel the need for prayer. Many offer prayer because they live in society and think they must participate in its activities. No wonder they hanker after variety. As a matter of fact however they do not *attend* prayer. They want to enjoy the music or are merely curious or wish to listen to the sermon. They are not there to be one with God.

IV

Prarthana (Gujarati word for prayer) literally means to ask for something, that is, to ask God for something in a spirit of humility. Here it is not used in that sense, but in the sense of praising or worshipping God, meditation and self-purification.

But who is God? God is not some person outside ourselves or away from the universe. He pervades every thing, and is omniscient as well as omnipotent. He does not need any praise or petitions. Being immanent in all beings, He hears everything and reads our innermost thoughts. He abides in our hearts and is nearer to us than the nails are to the fingers. What is the use of telling Him anything?

It is in view of this difficulty that *prarthna* is further paraphrased as self-purification. When we speak out aloud at prayer time, our speech is addressed not to God but to ourselves, and is intended to shake off our torpor. Some of us are intellectually aware of God, while others are afflicted by doubt. None has seen Him face to face. We desire to recognize and realize Him, to become one with Him, and seek to gratify that desire through prayer.

This God whom we seek to realize is Truth. Or to put it in another way Truth is God. This Truth is not merely the truth we are expected to speak. It is That which alone is, which constitutes the stuff of which all things are made, which subsists by virtue of its own power, which is not supported by anything else but supports everything that exists. Truth alone is eternal, everything else is momentary. It need not assume shape or form. It is pure intelligence as well as pure bliss. We call it Ishvara because everything is regulated by Its will. It and the law it promulgates are one. Therefore it is not a blind law. It governs the entire universe. To propitiate this Truth is *prarthana* which in effect means an earnest desire to be filled with the spirit of Truth. This desire should be present all the twenty-four hours. But our souls are too dull to have this awareness day and night. Therefore we offer prayers for a short time in the hope that a time will come when all our conduct will be one continuously sustained prayer.

Such is the ideal of prayer for the Ashram, which at present is far, far away from it. The detailed programme outlined above is something external, but the idea is to make our very hearts prayerful. If the Ashram prayers are not still attractive, if even the inmates of the Ashram attend them under compulsion of a sort, it only means that none of us is still a man of prayer in the real sense of the term.

In heartfelt prayer the worshipper's attention is concentrated on the object of worship so much so that he is not conscious of anything else besides. The worshipper has well been compared to a lover. The lover forgets the whole world and even himself in the presence of the beloved. The identification of the worshipper with God should be closer still. It comes only after much striving, self-suffering *(tapasa)* and self-discipline. In a place which such a worshipper sancitifies by his presence, no inducements need be offered to people for attending prayers, as they are drawn to the house of prayer by the force of his devotion.

We have dealt so far with congregational prayer but great stress is also laid in the Ashram on individual and solitary prayer. One who never prays by himself may attend congregational prayers but will not derive much advantage from them. They are absolutely necessary for a congregation, but as congregation is made up of individuals, they are fruitless without individual prayers. Every member of the Ashram is therefore reminded now and then that he should of his own accord give himself up to self-introspection at all times of the day. No watch can be kept that he does this, and no account can be maintained of such silent prayer. I cannot say how far it prevails in the Ashram, but I believe that some are making more or less effort in that direction.

Ashram Observances in Action, (Edn. 1959), Chap. II

105
THE ASHRAM PRAYER

I

(From *Harijansevak*)

The Ashram prayer has become very popular. Its development has been spontaneous. The *Ashram Bhajanavali* (Hymn book) has gone into several editions and is increasingly in demand. The birth and growth of this prayer has not been artificial. There is a history attached to almost every *shloka* and every selected *bhajan.* The *Bhajanavali* contains among others *bhajans* from Muslim Sufis and Fakirs, from Guru Nanak, and from the Christian hymnary. Every religion seems to have found a natural setting in the prayer book.

Chinese, Burmese, Jews, Ceylonese, Muslims, Parsis, Europeans and Americans have all lived in the Ashram from time to time. In the same way two Japanese Sadhus came to me in Maganwadi in 1935. One of them was with me till the other day when war broke out with Japan. He was an ideal inmate of our home in Sevagram. He took part in every activity with zest. I never heard of his quarrelling with anyone. He was a silent worker. He learnt as much Hindi as he could. He was a strict observer of his vows. Every morning and evening he could be seen going round with his drum and heard chanting his *mantra*. The evening worship always commenced with his *mantra* नम्यो हो रेंगे क्यों which means "I bow to the Buddha, the giver of true religion." I shall never forget the quickness, the orderliness and utter detachment with which he prepared himself the day the police came without notice to take him away from the Ashram. He took leave of me after reciting his favourite *mantra* and left his drum with me. "You are leaving us, but your *mantra* will remain an integral part of our Ashram prayer," were the words that came spontaneously to my lips. Since then, in spite of his absence, our morning and evening woship has commenced with the *mantra*. For me it is a constant reminder of Sadhu Keshav's purity and single-eyed devotion. Indeed its efficacy lies in that sacred memory.

While Sadhu Keshav was still with us Bibi Raihana Tyabji also came to stay at Sevagram for a few days. I knew her to be a devout Muslim but was not aware, before the death of her illustrious father, of how well-versed she was in Koran Sharif. When that jewel of Gujarat, Tyabji Saheb, expired, no sound of weeping broke the awful slience in his room. The latter echoed with Bibi Raihana's sonorous recitation of verses from the Koran. Such as Abbas Tyabji Saheb cannot die. He is ever alive in the example of national service which he has left behind. Bibi Raihana is an accomplished singer with an ample repertory of *bhajans* of all kinds. She used to sing daily as well as recite beautiful verses from the Koran. I asked her to teach some verses to any of the inmates who could learn them, and she gladly did so. Like so many who come here she had become one of us. Raihana went away when her visit was over, but she has left a fragrant reminder of herself. The well-known 'al Fateha' has been included in the Ashram worship. The following is a translation of it:

"1. I take refuge in Allah
from Satan the accursed.

"2. Say: He is God, the one and only God,
the Eternal Absolute,
He begetteth not nor is He begotten,
And there is none like unto Him.

"3. Praise be to God.
The Cherisher and Sustainer of the words,
Most Gracious, most Merciful,
Master of the Day of Judgment,
Thee do we worship
And thine aid we seek.
Show us the straight way,
The way of those on whom
Thou hast bestowed Thy Grace,
Those whose (portion) is not wrath
And who go not astray."

I am writing this note in reply to an ardent Hindu friend who thus gently reproached me "You have now given the

Kalma a place in the Ashram. What further remains to be done to kill your Hinduism?"

I am confident that my Hinduism and that of the other Ashram Hindus has govern thereby. There should be in us an equal reverence for all religions. Badshah Khan, whenever he comes, joins in the worship here with delight. He loves the tune to which the Ramayana is sung, and he listens intently to the Gita. His faith in Islam has not lessened thereby. Then why may I not listen to the Koran with equal reverence and adoration in my heart?

Vinoba and Pyarelal studied Arabic and learnt the Koran in jail. Their Hinduism has been enriched by this study. I believe that Hindu-Muslim unity will come only through such spontaneous mingling of hearts and no other. Rama is not known by only a thousand names. His names are innumerable and He is the same whether we call him Allaha, Khuda, Rahim, Razaak, the Breadgiver, or any name that comes from the heart of a true devotee.

Harijan, 15-2-'42, p. 44

II

(Originally appeared in "Notes" under the title "The Reason for Addition")

During the three days I passed in Shrinagar though I had prayers in the compound of Lala Kishorilal'a bungalow, where I was accommodated, I made no speeches. I had so declared before leaving Delhi. But some of the audience sent me questions. One was:

> "I attended your prayer meeting last evening in which you recited two prayers of the other communities. May I know what is your idea in doing so and what you mean by a religion?"

As I have observed before now, the selection from the Koran was introduced some years ago on the suggestion of Raihana Tyabji who was then living in the Sevagram Ashram and the one from the Parsi prayers at the instance of Dr. Gilder who recited the Parsi prayer on the break of my fast in the Aga Khan Palace during our detention. I am of opinion that the addition enriched the prayer. It reached the hearts of a larger

audience than before. It certainly showed Hinduism in its broad and tolerant aspect. The questioner ought also to have asked why the prayer commenced with the Buddhist prayer in Japanese. The selections of the stanzas of the prayer has a history behind it befitting the sacred character. The Buddhist prayer was the prayer with which the whole of Sevagram resounded in the early morning when a good Japanese monk was staying at the Sevagram Ashram and who by his silent and dignified conduct had endeared himself to the immates of the Ashram.

Harijan, 17-8-'47, p. 281

106
CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER
I

(From "The Leave-taking" by M. D. being Gandhiji's discourse at the last prayer meeting held before his leaving Bangalore)

After the meeting was the prayer which had become an institution during our stay at Kumara Park. The last day's meeting was a treasurable experience for the presence of Mr. Andrews, and the Bjerrums who sang 'When I survey the wondrous Cross' which, Gandhiji said, transported him to Pretoria where he heard the wonderful hymn sung for the first time, and also for the parting talk that Gandhiji gave to the congregation. "How many of you have been coming here regularly?" asked Gandhiji, and most of them raised their hands.

"I am glad you have been coming," said Gandhiji. "For me it has been both a joy, and a privilege, inasmuch as I have felt its elevating influence. I ask you to keep it up. You may not know the verses, you may not know Sanskrit and the hymns, but Ramanama is there for all, the heritage handed down from ages. And I tell you why I ask you to continue this congregational prayer. Man is both an individual and a social being. As an individual he may have his prayer during all the waking hours, but as a member of society he has to join in the congregational prayer. I for one may tell you that when I am alone I do have my prayer, but I do feel very lonely without a

congregation to share the prayer with me. I knew and even now know very few of you, but the fact that I had the evening prayers with you was enough for me. Among the many memories that will abide in my heart after I leave Bangalore, not the least will be the prayer meetings. But I shall have my congregation at the next place I reach, and forget the wrench. For one who accepts the brotherhood of man and fatherhood of God, should find a congregation wherever he goes, and he may not hug or nurse the feeling of parting or separation. Please, therefore, keep up the prayer. You can form your own congregation in your own places, and as a last resource one's family can become one's congregation well enough. Do meet every evening at this hour, learn a few hymns, learn the Gita, do the best and the most you can for the purpose of self-purification."

Young India, 8-9-'27, p. 294 at 295

II

(From "Collective Prayer")

Q.: You believe in mass prayer. Is congregational worship as practised today, a true prayer? In my opinon, it is a degarding thing and therefore dangerous. Jesus said : "When thou prayest, thou shall not be as the hypocrites are, but enter into thine inner chamber and having shut the door pray to the Father which is in secret." Most people in a crowd are inattentive and unable to concentrate. Prayer then becomes hypocrisy. The Yogi is aware of this. Should not the masses, therefore, be taught self-examination which is the true prayer?

A.: I hold that congregational worship held by me, is true prayer for a collection of men. The convener is a believer and no hypocrite. If he were one, the prayer would be tainted at the source. The men and women who attend do not go to any orthodox prayer from which they might have to gain an earthly end. The bulk of them have no contact with the convener. Hence it is presumed, they do not come for show. They join in because they believe that they somehow or other, acquire merit by having common prayer. That most or some persons are inattentive or unable to concentrate, is very true. That merely

shows that they are beginners. Neither inattention nor inability to concentrate are any proof of hypocrisy or falsity. It would be, if they pretended to be attentive when they were not. On the contrary, many have often asked me what they should do, when they are unable to concentrate.

The saying of Jesus quoted in the question, is wholly inapplicable. Jesus was referring to individual prayer and to hypocrisy underlying it. There is nothing in the verse quoted, against collective prayer. I have remarked often enough that without individual prayer, collective prayer is not of much use. I hold that individual prayer is a prelude to collective, as the latter, when it is effective, must lead to the individual. In other words, when a man has got to the stage of heart prayer, he prays always, whether in the secret or in the multitude.

I do not know what the questioner's Yogi does or does not. I know that the masses when they are in tune with the Infinite, naturally resort to self-examination. All real prayer must have that end.

Harijan, 22-9-'46, p. 319

107
HOW I INTRODUCED CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(The following extracts are taken from an address delivered by Gandhiji in Hindustani at a mammoth gathering in Bombay of which the gist in English prepared by Pyarelal appeared under the title "Satyagraha — The Art of Living and Dying".)

"I introduced the practice of having congregational prayer some time before the commencement of the South Africa Satyagraha struggle. The Indian community there was faced with a grave peril. We did all that was humanly possible. All methods of seeking redress, agitation through the press and the platform, petitions and deputations, were tried out but proved of no avail. What was the Indian community consisting of a mere handful of illiterate indentured labourrers mostly, with a sprinkling of free merchants, hawkers, etc. to do in the midst of an overwhelming majority of Negroes and Whites? The

Whites were fully armed. It was clear that if the Indians were to come into their own, they must forge a weapon which would be different from and infinitely superior to the force which the White settlers commanded in such ample measure. It was then that I introduced a congregational prayer in Phoenix and Tolstoy Farm as a means for training in the use of the weapon of Satyagraha or soul force.

"The singing of Ramadhun is the most important part of congregational prayer. The millions may find it difficult to correctly recite and understand the Gita verses and the Arabic and Zend Avesta prayers, but everybody can join in chanting Ramanama or God's name. It is as simple as it is effective. Only it must proceed from the heart. In its simplicity lies its greatness and the secret of its universality. Anything that millions can do together becomes charged with a unique power.

"I congratulate you on your success in the mass singing of Ramadhun without any previous training. But it is capable of further improvement. You should practise it in your homes. I am here to testify that when it is sung in tune to the accompaniment of *tal,* the triple accord of the voice, the accompaniment and thought creates an atmosphere of ineffable sweetness and strength which no words can describe."

Harijan, 7-4-'46, p. 73

108
THE OBJECT OF CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

(An extract from the report of the speech of Gandhiji at an evening prayer in Bombay which appeared in "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal is given below.)

It becomes a man to remember his Maker all the twenty-four hours. If that cannot be done we should at least congregate at prayer time to renew our covenant with God. Whether we are Hindus or Musalmans, Parsis, Christians or Sikhs, we all worship the same God. Congregational prayer is a means for establishing the essential human unity through common worship. Mass singing of Ramadhun and the beating of *tal* are

its outward expression. If they are not a mechanical performance but are an echo of the inner unison, as they should be, they generate a power and an atmosphere of sweetness and fragrance which has only to be seen to be realized.

Harijan, 3-3-'46, p. 25

109
IS CONCENTRATION OF MIND POSSIBLE IN MASS PRAYER?

(From "Notes")

Q.: Is it possible that during prayers, for thousands who assemble at your prayer gatherings, to concentrate their minds on anything whatever?

A.: I can only answer yes. For, if I do not believe in mass prayer, I should cease to hold public prayers. My experience confirms my belief. Success depends upon the purity of the leader and the faith of the audience. I know instances in which the audience had faith and the leader was an impostor. Such case will continue to happen. But truth like the sun shines in the midst of the darkness of untruth. The result in my case will be known probably after my death.

Harijan, 21-7-'46, p. 229

110
COMPULSORY PRAYER

(From "Question Box")

Q.: I am a worker in the Rajashtan branch of the A..I. S. A. I believe in prayer but some of my colleagues do not. Still they have got to join in prayer under the rules of the *Sanstha.* They are afraid that, if they refuse, they would lose their job. My view is that the *Sanstha* pays wages to its workers for their eight hours' work. What right has it to insist upon including compulsory participation in prayer by their workers into the bargain?

A.: There can be no such thing as compulsory prayer. A prayer to be prayer must be voluntary. But nowadays people entertain curious ideas about complusion. Thus, if the rules of your institution require every inmate — paid or unpaid — to attend common prayer, in my opinion you are bound to attend it as you are to attend to your other duties. Your joining the institution was a voluntary act. You knew or ought to have known its rules. Therefore, your attendance at prayer I would regard as a voluntary act, even as I would treat your other work under the contract. If you joined the institution merely because of the wages it offered, you should have made it clear to the manager that you could not attend prayer. If in spite of your objection you entered the institution without stating your objection, you did a wrong thing for which you should make expiation. This can be done in two ways — by joining the prayer with your heart in it, or by resigning and paying such compensation as may be necessary for the loss caused by your sudden resignation. Everyone joining an institution owes it to obey the rules framed by the management from time to time. When any new rule is found irksome, it is open to the objector to leave the institution in accordance with the provisions made for resignation. But he may not disobey them whilst he is in it.

Harijan, 13-7-'40, p. 193 at p. 194

111
RAMANAMA, THE TALISMAN

(Mr. Maurice Frydman wrote a long letter* to Gandhiji in which he said that external observances like prayer were not efficient means for the practice of truth and non-violence and commended the path of constant observation, awareness and alertness. Gandhiji's comment on the letter is reproduced below. The letter and the comment were published originally under the title "Mindfulness, the Remedy".)

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*Omitted from this compilation.

Thus writes Mr. Frydman, better known to the public as Bhartanand. . . .I have not fallen in love with it because this too has not caught on. If it was a seven days' work, why is it that it has so few witnesses in the world today? In so far as it is an aid, it is in general vogue and takes its place among the other remedies, whether it is called mindfulness, vigilance or meditation. It is in addition to these outward observances so long as the latter are not for show. Indeed, prayer is purely an inward act. Those who found in Ramanama the talisman knew mindfulness and found by experience that Ramanama was the best of all the remedies adopted for the practice of truth and non-violence.

Harijan, 16-6-'45, p. 178

112
A SURE AID

A correspondent suggests three aids to self-control of which two are outward and one is inward. The inward help he describes as follows :

> "A third thing that helps towards self-control is Ramanama. This has got the terrible power of converting one's sex desire into a divine longing for the Lord. In fact it seems to me from experience that the sex desire present in almost all human beings is a form of *Kundalini Shakti* left to its own natural growth and development. Just as man has fought against nature ever since creation, so also he should fight against this natural tendency of his *Kundalini* and see that it acts upward instead of downward. Once the *Kundalini* begins to act upward its direction is towards the brain and gradually will it dawn upon such a man that he and all whom he sees around him are but different manifestations of the same Lord."

There is no doubt that Ramanama is the surest aid. If recited from the heart it charms away every evil thought, and evil thought gone, no corresponding action is possible. The outward helps are all useless if the mind is weak. They are superfluous if the mind is pure. This must not be taken to

mean that a pure-minded man can take all the liberties and still keep safe. Such a man simply will not take any liberties with himself. His whole life will be an infallible testimony to the inward purity. The Gita truly says that mind makes the man and unmakes him. Milton paraphrases the same thought when he says:

> "The mind is its own place and in itself can make a heaven of hell and hell of heaven."

Harijan, 12-5-'46, p. 132

113
NAMAJAPA CLEANSES THE HEART

(Gandhiji wrote a number of letters in Gujarati to an Ashram sister. These letters were translated into Marathi and published in 1938 under the title वात्सल्याची प्रसाद-दीक्षा*. The following is a rendering in English of an extract from letter No. 43 dated 30-7-1932 from Yeravda Prison.)

Namajapa cleanses the heart thus : A person who repeats *nama* with a pure heart does so with faith. He begins with the resolve that *namajapa* will purify his heart. Purity of the self follows the cleansing of the heart. One who takes the *nama* with faith will not tire in his pursuit and what is on his lips today will ultimately possess his heart and purify him. Such experience is universal and knows no exception. Psychologists are also of opinion that as a man thinks so he becomes. Ranamana conforms to this rule. I have firm faith in *namajapa*. Discovery of *namajapa* was born out of experience and understanding and is of utmost importance. The doors to purity should be open even to the unlettered and *namajapa* will unlock them. (See Gita, IX, 22 and X, 17).

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*The above book was published in *Sulabh Rashtriya Granthamala* series Pune, in 1938 and was edited by Acharya Kaka Kalelkar.

114
THE ALCHEMY OF RAMANAMA

(Originally appeared under the title “Towards Realization”, translated from the original Gujarati)

What is the mark of him who has Rama enthroned in his heart? If we do not know this, there is danger of Ramanama being much misinterpreted. Some misinterpretation is already in existence. Many sport rosaries and put the sacred mark on the forehead and vainly babble His name. It may well be asked whether I am not adding to the current hypocrisy by continued insistence on Ramanama. I must not be deterred by such forebodings. Silence thus brought about is harmful. The living voice of silence needs to be backed by prolonged heartfelt practice. In the absence of such natural silence, we must try to know the marks of him who has Rama in his heart.

A devotee of Rama may be said to be the same as the steadfast one *(sthitaprajna)* of the Gita. If one goes a little deeper it will be seen that a true devotee of God faithfully obeys the five elemental forces of nature. If he so obeys, he will not fall ill. If per chance he does, he will cure himself with the aid of the elementals. It is not for the dweller in the body to get the body cured anyhow — he who believes that he is nothing but body will naturally wander to the ends of the earth in order to cure the body of its ills. But he who realizes that the soul is something apart from, though in the body, that it is imperishable in contrast to the perishable body, will not be perturbed nor mourn if the elementals fail. On the contrary he will welcome death as a friend. He will become his own healer instead of seeking for medical men. He will live in the consciousness of the soul within and look to the care, first and last, of the indweller.

Such a man will take God’s name with every breath. His Rama will be awake even whilst the body is asleep. Rama will always be with him in whatever he does. The real death for such a devoted man will be the loss of this sacred companionship.

As an aid to keeping his Rama with him, he will take what the five elementals have to give him. That is to say he will employ the simplest and easiest way of deriving all the benefit he can from earth, air, water, sunlight and ether. This aid is not complementary to Ramanama. It is but a means of its realization. Ramanama does not in fact require any aid. But to claim belief in Ramanama and at the same time to run to doctors do not go hand in hand.

A friend versed in religious lore who read my remarks on Ramanama sometime ago wrote to say that Ramanama is an alchemy such as can transform the body. The conservation of the vital energy has been likened to accumulated wealth, but it is in the power of Ramanama alone to make it a running stream of ever-increasing spiritual strength ultimately making a fall impossible.

Just as the body cannot exist without blood, so the soul needs the matchless and pure strength of faith. This strength can renovate the weakness of all man's physical organs. That is why it is said that when Ramanama is enshrined in the heart, it means the rebirth of man. This law applies to the young, the old, man and woman alike.

This belief is to be found in the West too. Christian sciences give a glimpse of it. In this issue of the *Harijan* Rajkumari has given illustrations culled from a book written by Seventh Day Adventists.

India needs no outside support for a belief which has been handed down to her people from time immemorial.

Harijan, 29-6-'47, p. 212

115
MY REFUGE IN THE DARKEST HOUR

(From "Weekly Letter" by M. D.)

Mr. Mathews was curious to know, if Gandhiji followed any spiritual practice and what special reading he had found helpful.

Gandhiji : I am a stranger to Yogic practices. The practice I follow is a practice I learnt in my childhood from my nurse. I was afraid of ghosts. She used to say to me : 'There are no ghosts, but if you are afraid, repeat Ramanama.' What I learnt in my childhood has become a huge thing in my mental firmament. It is a sun that has brightened my darkest hour. A Christian may find the same solace from the repetition of the name of Jesus and a Muslim from the name of Allah. All these things have the same implications and they produce identical results under identical circumstances. Only the repetition must not be a lip expression, but part of your very being. About helpful readings, we have regular readings of the Bhagavadgita and we have now reached a stage when we finish the Gita every week by having readings of appointed chapters every morning. Then we have hymns from the various saints of India, and we therein include hymns from the Christian hymn book. As Khansaheb is with us, we have readings from the Koran also. We believe in the equality of all religions. I derive the greatest consolation from my reading of Tulasidas's Ramayana. I have also derived solace from the New Testament and the Koran. I don't approach them with a critical mind. They are to me as important as the Bhagavadgita, though everything in the former may not appeal to me — everything in the Epistles of Paul for instance, nor everything in Tulasidas. The Gita is a pure religious discourse given without any embellishment. It simply describes the progress of the pilgrim soul towards the supreme goal. Therefore, there is no question of selection.

Harijan, 5-12-'36, p. 337 at p. 339

116
THE UNFAILING REFUGE

(From "Weekly Letter" by Shri Pyarelal)

At Laksham there is a refugees' camp. And it was to the refugees that Gandhiji's words were addressed through the crowd that had assembled at the platform to hear him and have his *darshan.* "I have not come on a whirlwind propaganda visit, I have come to stay here with you as one of you...."

"The greatest help you can give me is to banish fear from your hearts," he told them. And what was the talisman that could do that for them? It was his unfailing *mantra* of Ramanama. "You may say you do not believe in Him. You do not know that but for His will you could not draw a single breath. Call Him Ishvara, Allah, God, Ahura Mazda. His names are as innumerable as there are men. He is one without a second. He alone is great. There is none greater than He. He is timeless, formless, stainless. Such is my Rama. He alone is my Lord and Master."

He touchingly described to them how as a little boy he used to be usually timid and afraid of even shadows and how his nurse Rambha had taught him the secret of Ramanama as an antidote to fear. 'When in fear take Ramanama. He will protect you,' she used to tell him. Ever since then Ramanama had been his unfailing refuge and shelter from all kinds of fear.

"He resided in the heart of the pure always. Tulasidas, that prince of devotees, whose name has become a household word among the Hindus from Kashmir to Kanyakumari as Shri Chaitanya's and Ramakrishna Paramhamsa's in Bengal, has presented the message of that name to us in his immortal Ramayana. If you walk in fear of that name, you need fear no man on earth, be he a prince or a pauper."

Harijan, 24-11-'46, p. 409

117
A WELL-TRIED FORMULA

(From "Notes")

It is easy enough to take a vow under a stimulating influence. But it is difficult to keep to it especially in the midst of temptation. God is our only help in such circumstances. I therefore suggested to the meeting* Ramanama. Rama, Allah and God are to me convertible terms. I had discovered that simple people deluded themselves in the belief that I appeared to them in their distress. I wanted to remove the superstition. I knew that I appeared to nobody. It was pure hallucination for them to rely on a frail mortal. I therefore presented them with a simple and well-tried formula that has never failed, namely to invoke the assistance of God every morning before sunrise, and every evening before bed time for the fulfilment of the vows. Millions of Hindus know him under the name of Rama. As a child I was taught to call upon Rama when I was seized with fear. I know many of my companions to whom Ramanama has been of the greatest solace in the hour of their need. I presented it to the Dharalas[3] and to the untouchables. I present it also to the reader whose vision is not blurred and whose faith is not damped by overmuch learning. Learning takes us through many stages in life but it fails us utterly in the hour of danger and temptation. Then faith alone saves. Ramanama is not for those who tempt God in every way possible and ever expect it to save. It is for those who walk in the fear of God, who want to restrain themselves and cannot in spite of themselves.

Young India, 22-1-'25, p. 25 at p. 26

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*Of elders at Vedchhi in Surat district.

[3] A fierce, military tribe in Gujarat whose occupation is chiefly farming.

118
RAMANAMA IS ALL-SUFFICING

(The following passage is taken from "The Purification Week" by M. D. from where the following remarks of Gandhiji to a friend on Ramanama are taken.)

Ramanama to me is all-sufficing. There are as many names of God as His manifestations, but sages have, as a result of their life-long penance, devised names to be uttered by the devotees, in order to be able to commune with the Nameless. There are other *mantras* than Ramanama, but for me that is supreme. It has become part of my life. When a child, my nurse taught me to repeat Ramanama whenever I felt afraid or miserable, and it has been second nature with me with growing knowledge and advancing years. I may even say that the Word is in my heart, if not actually on my lips, all the twenty-four hours. It has been my saviour and I am ever stayed on it. In the spiritual literature of the world, the Ramayana of Tulasidas takes a foremost place. It has charms that I miss in the Mahabharata and even in Valmiki's Ramayana.

Harijan, 17-8-'34, p. 209 at p. 212

119
WHO IS RAMA?

(From "Question Box")

Q. : You have often said that when you talk of Rama you refer to the ruler of the universe and not to Rama, the son of Dasharatha. But we find that your Ramadhun calls on 'Sita-Rama', 'Raja-Rama' and it ends with 'Victory to Rama, the Lord of Sita'. Who is this Rama if not the son of the King Dasharatha?

A.: I have answered such questions before. But there is something new in this one. It demands a reply. In Ramadhun 'Raja-Rama', 'Sita-Rama' are undoubtedly repeated. Is not this

Rama the same as the son of Dasharatha? Tulasidas has answered this question. But let me put down my own view. More potent than Rama is the Name. Hindu Dharma is like a boundless ocean teeming with priceless gems. The deeper you dive the more treasures you find. In Hindu religion God is known by various names. Thousands of people look doubtless upon Rama and Krishna as historical figures and literally believe that God came down in person on earth in the form of Rama, the son of Dasharatha, and by worshipping him one can attain salvation. The same thing holds good about Krishna. History, imagination and truth have got so inextricably mixed up. It is next to impossible to disentangle them. I have accepted all the names, and forms attributed to God, as symbols connoting one formless omnipresent Rama. To me, therefore, Rama, described as the Lord of Sita, son of Dasharatha, is the all powerful essence whose name, inscribed in the heart, removes all suffering, mental, moral and physical.

Harijan, 2-6-'46, p. 158

120
RAMA, THE SON OF DASHARATHA

An Arya Samajist writes :

> "How can the Rama whom you believe to be immortal, be Rama, the son of Dasharatha and the husband of Sita? I often attend your prayer gathering with this dilemma always confronting me and because of it, I am unable to join in the Ramadhun. This hurts me for you are right when you say that all should take part in it. Cannot you make the Ramadhun, such that all can join in the recital?"

I have already explained what I mean by all. It applies to all those who can join in it from the heart and recite it in tune. The others should remain silent. But this is a small matter. The important question is as to how Rama, the son of Dasharatha, can be deemed immortal. This question was raised by saint Tulasidas himself and answered by him. The answer cannot in reality be reasoned out. It does not lend itself to intellectual

satisfaction. It is a matter of heart speaking to heart. I worshipped Rama as Sita's husband in the first instance, but as my knowledge and experience of Him grew, my Rama became immortal and omnipresent. This does not mean that Rama ceased to be Sita's husband; but the meaning of Sita's husband expanded with the vision of Rama. This is how the world evolves. Rama cannot became omnipresent for the man who regards him merely as the son of Dasharatha. But for the believer in Rama as God, the father of the omnipresent Rama also becomes omnipresent — the father and son become one. It may be said that this is all a matter of imagination. "To each man according to his faith", is all that I can say. If all religions are one at source, we have to synthesize them. Today they are looked upon as separate and that is why we kill each other. When we are tired of religion, we become atheists and then, apart from the little self, nothing not even God, exists. But when we acquire true understanding, the little self perishes and God becomes all in all. Rama then is and is not the son of Dasharatha, the husband of Sita, the Brother of Bharata and Lakshmana and yet is God, the unborn and eternal. All honour then to those who, not believing in Rama as the son of Dasharatha, still come to join in the collective prayers. This matter of Rama is one which transcends reason. I have merely tried to give to the reader my belief for what it is worth.

Harijan, 22-9-'46, p. 323

121
RAMANAMA MUST NOT CEASE

(From "Question Box" — translated from Hindustani)

Q. : While in conversation or doing brain work or when one is suddenly worried, can one recite Ramanama in one's heart? Do people do so at such times, and if so, how?

A. : Experience shows that man can do so at any time, even in sleep, provided Ramanama is enshrined in his heart. If the taking of the name has become a habit, its recitation through the heart becomes as natural as the heart beat.

Otherwise, Ramanama is a mere mechanical performance or at best has touched the heart only on the surface. When Ramanama has established its dominion over the heart, the question of vocal recitation does not arise. Because then it transcends speech. But it may well be held that persons who have attained this state are few and far between.

There is no doubt whatsoever that Ramanama contains all the power that is attributed to it. No one can, by mere wishing, enshrine Ramanama in his heart. Untiring effort is required as also patience. What an amount of labour and patience have been lavished by man to acquire the non-existent philosopher's stone? Surely, God's name is of infinitely richer value and always existent.

Q. : Is it harmful if, owing to stress or exigencies of work, one is unable to carry out daily devotions in the prescribed manner? Which of the two should be given preference? Service or the rosary?

A. : Whatever the exigencies of service or adverse circumstances may be, Ramanama must not cease. The outward form will vary according to the occasion. The absence of the rosary does not interrupt Ramanama which has found an abiding place in the heart.

Harijan, 17-2-'46, p. 12

122
INSTALLING RAMANAMA IN THE HEART

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal. Extracts from a prayer discourse of Gandhiji as reported therein are culled out below.)

To install Ramanama in the heart required infinite patience. It might even take ages. But the effort was worthwhile. Even so success depended solely on the grace of God.

Ramanama could not come from the heart unless one had cultivated the virtues of truth, honesty and purity within and without. Every day at the evening prayers they repeated the *shlokas* describing the man with a steadfast intellect. Every one

of them, said Gandhiji, could become a *Sthitaprajna* — man with steadfast intellect — if he kept his senses under discipline, ate and drank and allowed himself enjoyment and recreation only to sustain life for service. If one had no control over one's thoughts, if one did not mind, for instance, sleeping in a hole or a room with all doors and windows shut, and breathing foul air or drinking dirty water, his recitation of Ramanama was in vain.

That, however, did not mean that one should give up reciting Ramanama on the ground that one had not the requisite purity. For, recitation of Ramanama was also a means for acquiring purity. "In the case of a man who repeats Ramanama from the heart, discipline and self-control will come easy. Observance of the rules of health and hygiene will run an even course. He will never want to hurt anyone. To suffer in order to relieve others' suffering will become a part of his being and fill him with an ineffable and perennial joy." Let them, therefore, said Gandhiji, persevere and ceaselessly repeat Ramanama during all their waking hours. Ultimately, it would remain with them even during their sleep and God's grace would then fill them with perfect health of body, mind and spirit.

Harijan, 2-6-'46, p. 166 at p. 168

123
RECITATION OF RAMANAMA

(From "Notes"; translated from *Harijansevak*)

Q. : Is it not enough to have Ramanama in one's heart or is there something special in its recitation?

A. : I believe there is special merit in the recitation of Ramanama. If anyone knows that God is in truth residing in his heart, I admit that for him there is no need for recitation. But I have not known such a person. On the contrary, my personal experience tells me that there is something quite extraordinary in the recitation of Ramanama. Why or how is not necessary to know.

Harijan, 14-4-'46, p. 92

124
VAIN REPETITIONS

(From "Question Box")

Q. : All agree that mechanical repetition of prayer is worse than useless. It acts as an opiate on the soul. I often wonder why you encourage repetition morning and evening of the eleven great vows as a matter of routine. May not this have a dulling effect on the moral consciousness of our boys? Is there no better way of inculcating these vows?

A. : Repetitions when they are not mechanical produce marvellous results. Thus I do not regard the rosary as a superstition. It is an aid to the pacification of a wandering brain. Daily repetition of the vows falls under a different category. It is a daily reminder to the earnest seeker as he rises and retires that he is under the eleven vows which are to regulate his conduct. No doubt it will lose its effect if a person repeats the vows mechanically under the delusion that the mere repetition will bring him merit. You may ask, "Why repeat the vows at all? You know that you have taken them and are expected to observe them." There is force in the argument. But experience has shown that a deliberate repetition gives stimulus to the resolution. Vows are to the weak mind and soul what tonics are to a weak body. Just as a healthy body needs no tonics, a strong mind may retain its health without the need of vows and the daily reminder thereof. An examination of the vows will, however, show that most of us are weak enough to need their assistance.

Harijan, 6-4-'40, p. 73 at p. 74

125
RIDICULING RAMANAMA

(From *Harijansevak*)

Q. : You know we are so ignorant and dull that we actually begin to worship the images of our great men instead of living up to their teachings. *Ramalila, Krishnalila* and the recently opened Gandhi temple are a living testimony of that. The Ramanama bank in Banaras and wearing clothes printed with Ramanama is, in my opinion, a caricature and even insult of Ramanama. Don't you think that under these circumstances your telling the people to take to Ramanama as a sovereign remedy for all ailments is likely to encourage ignorance and hypocrisy? Ramanama repeated from the heart can be a sovereign remedy, but in my opinion religious education of the right type alone can lead to that state.

A. : You are right. There is so much superstition and hypocrisy around that one is afraid even to do the right thing. But if one gives way to fear, even truth will have to be suppressed. The golden rule is to act fearlessly upon what one believes to be right. Hypocricy and untruth will go on in the world. Our doing the right thing will result in their decrease if any, never in their increase. The danger is that when we are surrounded by falsehood on all sides we might be caught in it and begin to deceive ourselves. We should be careful not to make a mistake out of our laziness and ignorance. Constant vigilance under all circumstances is essential. A votary of truth cannot act otherwise. Even an all-power remedy like Ramanama can become useless for lack of wakefulness and care, and become one more addition to the numerous current superstitions.

Harijan, 2-6-'46, p. 160

126
A NEW SUPERSTITION ?

(From "Weekly Letter" by Pyarelal)

"Am I propagating a new variety of superstition ?" asked Gandhiji in the course of one of his recent prayer discourses at Poona. "God is not a person. He is the all-pervading, all-powerful spirit. Anyone who bears Him in his heart has accession of a marvellous force of energy comparable in its results to physical forces like stream or electricity, but much more subtle." Ramanama was not like black magic. It had to be taken with all that it symbolized. He likened it to a mathematical formula which sums up in brief the results of endless research and experimentation. Mere mechanical repetition of Ramanama could not give strength. For that, one had to understand and live up to the conditions attaching to its recitation. To take God's name one must live a Godly life.

Harijan, 14-7-'46, p. 217

127
RAMANAMA AGAIN

A friend sends me a letter received by him for an answer. The letter is long. I have only copied here the relevant part :

> "India is in his blood, but why should he cause resentment among his countrymen who are not of his religious faith, by holding daily prayer meetings and chanting Ramanama (meaning the name of Rama, the Hindu god)? He should realize that India is full of manifold faiths and most of the conservatives are apt to mistake him (and this is one of the pleas of the Muslim League), if he openly goes on talking in the name of the Hindu gods. One of his pet terms is the establishment of Ramarajya (the rule of Rama). What would a devout Muslim feel about this?"

I must repeat for the thousandth time that Ramanama is one of the many names for God. The same prayer meetings

have recitations from the Koran and the Zend Avesta. Devout Muslims, for the very reason that they are devout, have never objected to the chant of Ramanama. Ramanama is not an idle chant. It is conceived as a mode of addressing the all-pervasive God known to me, as to millions of Hindus, by the familiar name of Ramanama. 'Nama' at the end of Rama is the most significant part. It means the 'Nama' without the Rama of history. Be that as it may, why should an open profession by me of my faith offend anybody, much less the Muslim League? No one is obliged to join these meetings and, having joined, is not obliged to take part in the chant. All that the visitors are expected to do is not to mar the harmony of the meeting and to tolerate the proceedings even when they are not in sympathy with any part.

As to the use of the phrase 'Ramarajya', why should it offend after my having defined its meaning many times? It is a convenient and expressive phrase, the meaning of which no alternative can so fully express to millions. When I visit the Frontier Province or address predominantly Muslim audiences I would express my meaning to them by calling it Khudai Raj, while to a Christian audience I would describe it as the Kingdom of God on earth. Any other mode would, for me, be self-suppression and hypocricy.

Harijan, 18-8-'46, p. 266

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The Essence of Hinduism is so planned and arranged that each section naturally leads to the next one. The first chapter examines the moral basis of Hinduism. The nature of the universal Moral Law or Power that sustains the universe is described in the second chapter. How can a seeker come face to face with the Supreme Spirit–through faith or trained reason or a judicious combination of both ? An answer to this conundrum will be found in the third chapter...

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This Book is primarily meant for lay readers and Hindu boys and girls attending English medium schools and brought up in families without any religious background, or in which religion has a minimal influence. As such, it will serve as an introduction to Hinduism.

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